

BANDWAGON

MAY-JUNE 2009



SHRINE CIRCUS

Damascus Temple
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BANDWAGON

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THE FRONT COVER

Shrine Temples have had a long association with the American circus. The first Shrine Circus was presented in Detroit, Michigan in February 1906. The circus was presented in the Light Guard Armory in Detroit. Shortly after that Milwaukee's Tripoli Temple held a circus. These early shows were presented in one ring. By 1925 the shows had grown to three rings.

The 1927 Damascus Temple Shrine Circus in Rochester, New York, was held November 14-19. Produced by Orrin Davenport, the powerhouse performance included equestrienne Lulu Davenport; Ella Bradna's Act Beautiful; Max Kidd, the man monkey; the Rubio sisters, hand balancing; the John Robinson elephants; Maximo, slack wire; the Orrin Davenport comedy riding act; and the Yacopi family, acrobats. The icing on the cake was Lillian Leitzel, and the Flying Codonas featuring Alfredo Codona.

CORRECTIONS

The following are corrections to the Season's Review in the March-April *Bandwagon*.

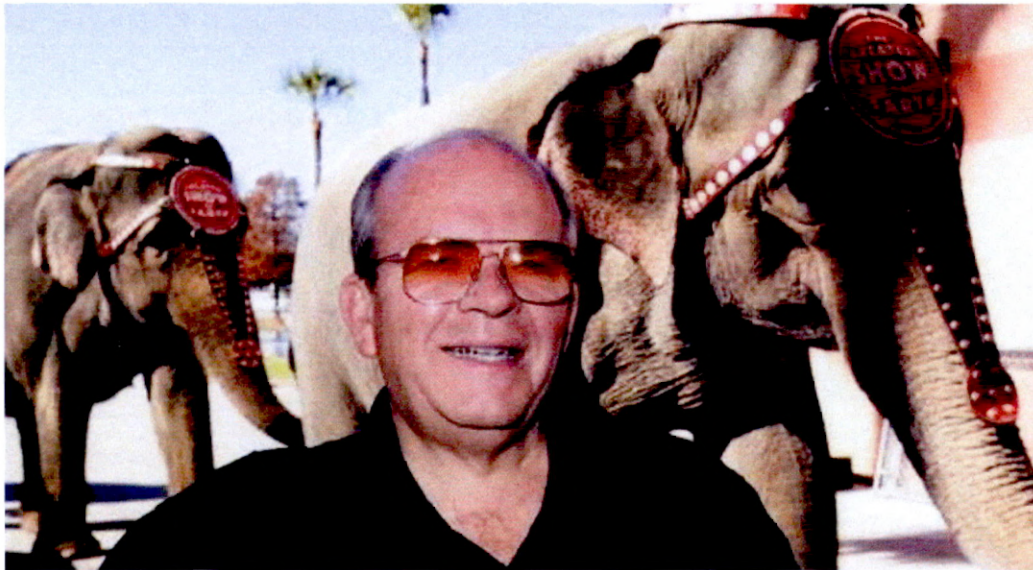
The wild animal trainer on page three is Tabayara Maluenda, not Daniel Raffo. Tom Dougherty was head clown on the Ringling-Barnum Blue unit, not the Red unit.

The Big Apple Circus coverage contained these errors.

Carrie Harvey was the host, Paul Binder was the ringmaster. Fumagalli's partner was Daris Huesca, not Davis. The Kovgar Troupe performed on the teeterboard, not risley. Rob Slowik was musical director. Virgile Peyramaure, Andrey Mantchev and Sarah Schwartz were the Golden State act. Regina Dobrovitskaya performed on the trapeze. Not mentioned were company acrobats Valdis Yanovski, Christian Atayde Stoinev and Katie Jane Jones. Thanks to Don Covington for these corrections.

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TIMOTHY J. HOLST 1947-2009

Timothy J. Holst was born in Galesburg, Illinois on October 9, 1947 to a devout Mormon family. He spent two and a half years as a missionary in Sweden for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was a former *Deseret News* entertainment writer. In 1969 he returned to his studies at Utah State University, where he performed at a summer playhouse.

In 1971 he enrolled in the Ringling-Barnum Clown Collage, his first connection with the Greatest Show on Earth. In 1972 he performed as an Auguste clown. After performing with the Blue unit he became a ringmaster on both units and later became performance director of the Red unit.

At this time Kenneth Feld headed the talent finding operation for his father, Irvin. After Irvin died in 1984 Kenneth groomed Holst as the show's new talent scout.

Holst's official title became Vice-President for Talent and Production. His duties took him around the world. He estimated he had visited about 164 countries. He was fluent in Spanish and Swedish, and spoke some Russian, Mandarin, French, and Portuguese.

Kenneth Feld said, "He was the ambassador to the world for the Greatest Show on Earth. And for the performers, he was the one who introduced them to America. He became involved with the performers lives at every step of the way."

Nicole Feld said, "Since 1986 Mr. Holst was responsible for the careers and livelihoods of more than 3,000 people, and since so many of them paired off, there are countless marriages that came from that."

A personal note, I have enjoyed Tim Holst's friendship for many years. I remember a delightful breakfast with him in Paris. I introduced him as the banquet speaker at the CHS convention in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Tim Holst died in San Paulo, Brazil on April 16, 2009. He is survived by daughters Megan and Adrienne, and son Matthew, a brother Thomas, a sister Sandra and a grandson. Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

In Memory of Charlie Smith (1915-2008)

Master of the Ringling Train-- And Just About All Else on the Circus Lot

BY LANE TALBURT

It was late autumn 1956, and Charlie Smith was enjoying one of those rare—for him--carefree days when he had nothing better to do than take a leisurely stroll down Sarasota's Main Street. A familiar voice from across the way shattered his reverie. "Art Concello recognized me and hollered after me and wanted to know if I wanted to have a cup of coffee" at the White House Café, Smith would recall many years later.

One thing led to another, and Concello, the former premiere flyer on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey who had been given the job of converting John Ringling North's circus from canvas to a building show, handed the 41-year-old Smith a challenge he couldn't refuse. "Concello said, 'I want you to go to work for us. We're building an indoor/outdoor show.' I said, 'Well, Art, I don't want to go to work. I just closed with the Beatty show, and I just want to spend some time off down here in Sarasota.'"

Responded Concello: "Yeah, but I want you to go out and report to Eddie Billetti at his shop. He needs a guy to do some welding." With those new marching orders, Smith, who had mastered numerous performing and operational skills during his previous two decades on the tanbark trail, began what would become a 39-year-career on the Greatest Show on Earth. Whether gripping Roman rings for mid-air flight, throwing knives at human targets, hoisting a bale-ring tent, or replacing a train car's worn brake shoe, Charlie Smith was always good with his hands around any circus. And when shouts of "Hey, Rube" wafted over the midway, Charlie could be counted on to jump in with both fists. As those who worked at his side over the years could attest, Charlie Smith's hands were seldom idle, right up to his departure for the Big Lot on November 25, 2008.

His death at age 93 stilled the voice and personality of a hands-on mentor who passed along his skills and passion to several generations of circus people. Smith was survived by

his wife Kitty in Nokomis, Florida; one son, Ronald, of Port Charlotte, Florida, from a previous marriage, and 13 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

Though he is largely remembered for his time-and-labor-saving innovations as trainmaster for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Smith early on established a reputation as a builder, a very special circus builder.

When he took final retirement in 1995 Smith was still a



Charlie Smith 1915-2008

builder, helping refurbish and recycle the world's largest circus fleet on rails. In the intervening four decades, he became a legend among circus trainmasters. In fact, Smith was the first--and remains the only--trainmaster to be inducted into the Sarasota Ring of Fame and to have a Circus Fans Association Tent named after him--the Charlie Smith CFA Tent #131, founded by the late Don Sexton of Aurora, Illinois.

Circus history is robust with examples of train derailments and washed out bridges that have resulted in death and injury. But during the 16 years--from 1966 to 1981--that he had the responsibility for the circus train, Smith ensured that Ringling Bros. never missed a single performance because of a train delay.

Though his accident-free record for a cumulative 300,000 rail miles and his train-loading shortcuts brought him the greatest recognition, there was hardly a chore on any lot, train or winter quarters that Charlie could not do. Few of his contemporaries survive to attest to Smith's skills as an all-round circus man during the Great Depression and beyond.

Gerald Becomes Charlie

And, as he explained in lengthy interviews with this writer in 2000 and 2002, he owed almost all of his adult livelihood--and the name Charlie--to the indoor and outdoor entertainment business. Born Gerald Smith on July 5, 1915, in Pleasant Hill, Illinois, he got his nickname while performing the lead role in a play entitled *Over the River*, Charlie on the Princess Iola Variety Fair Company, a medi-

cine show owned by Benjamin C. and Eva Davenport. The Davenports lived in Marble Head, Illinois, not far from the Smith homestead, and traveled with their vaudeville troupe in communities throughout Illinois, Indiana and Missouri. "I did this blackface character, and they named me Charlie. And it stuck with me all through my show business career. Nobody hardly knows my right name."

Left to his own desires, the 18-year-old Smith would have joined the show much earlier than 1934. But Ben Davenport insisted that the would-be performer remain in high school to get his diploma. Besides, Davenport already had another Smith on the payroll—Charlie's older brother, Harold, who had been a drummer since 1931. When Harold left the show to get married, Gerald took his place.

When he wasn't out front performing, Charlie played drums in the band, which included Eva Davenport on piano, and Paul Pyle on drums. Pyle would later become Charlie's brother-in-law and still later would offer him a key position on America's largest truck circus.

In the spring of 1935, when Ben Davenport launched the one-ring Davenport Society Circus—initially using only side walls, Smith learned the true meaning of being "generally useful" around the lot. "On a small show you have to do everything. You'd put up the show and take it down and help maintain it. You just have to learn it. It seems like I could do anything. Also, I was a performer on the Davenport Society Circus. I did an impalement act—a knife-throwing act, with my first wife, Virginia, standing in (while Smith hurled 12 knives at a board behind her). I had a five-person Roman rings act and I did a comedy chair-balancing act and a single trapeze routine." Charlie also appeared in the ring as a white-face clown.

Unlike his brother, Harold, who took a hometown girl as his bride, Charlie married into a circus family. His first wife, Virginia, and her sister, Mildred, were the performing daughters of Bertha Drane, long-time friend of Eva Davenport. Virginia became Charlie's wife, and sister Mildred married troupier Paul Pyle. Charlie and Virginia parented two sons, Ron and Kenny. The newlyweds also performed together on a double trap routine. They later divorced; both remarried.

About the same time, Charlie was becoming a mentor based on the skills he was accumulating under canvas on the circus and in rented halls of the vaudeville show. His star pupil was Ben and Eva's 4-year-old daughter, Norma Davenport, whom he initially taught to perform the swinging ladder routine and who at age 12 would become "the world's youngest elephant trainer." Norma, who later married Pete Cristiani of the famed Cristiani equestrian family, and her late parents were honored in 2007 with a plaque in the Ring of Fame. Norma and Pete visited Smith in his Nokomis home just days before his death.

Charlie would go on to tutor many other circus people in virtually all departments and make thousands of friends during his seven-decade career.

Young Boss Canvasman

Smith, at age 24, became boss canvasman in 1940 when Davenport enlarged the outdoor show to three rings and

renamed it Dailey Bros. Circus. He later recalled that, where the Davenport Society Circus toured with a 60- or 70-foot-round big top, the new show sported a 70- or 80-foot round top with three 30-foot middle sections. Although Dailey Bros. toured the West extensively during the 1940 season, it made only two stops in the California border towns of Barstow and Needles, owing to strict standards in that state requiring tents to be treated with a fire retardant. The Dailey Bros. big top, like most circus tents at that time, was not.



Youngest son Ronald, Charlie and son Kenny. All illustrations are from the Kitty Smith collection.

As the show expanded, Smith required more workers to put up the canvas, many of whom literally ran away from an impoverished or unhappy home life. One of his new hires in 1943 was a young vagabond, Robert Jones, who later transferred to the animal department to work around elephants. "The job was tough," "Smokey" Jones would write in 1994, "but being hungry was also tough. I was shuffled from job to job, always working, no idle time on this show."

Smith got an eyeful of grift on Davenport's enterprises. He also learned to use his fists. Ward Hall, who later was in the Dailey sideshow, said Smith attained legendary status when he and Ben Davenport at one time stood back to back, fighting off as many as two dozen local toughs.

When Dailey Bros. established winter quarters at Gonzales, Texas, at the end of the 1943 season, Smith picked up additional duties, becoming a welder and helping veteran general agent R. M. Harvey route the show. Prior to the 1944 season, when the show converted to a 10-car rail circus, Smith left the show to accept a non-circus job for more money. He was hired to rig parachutes at a war-related training school in Coleman, Texas. Smith's new boss was Harry Hammill, who would later become Davenport's partner.

Charlie Builds His First Show

On the school's closing Smith was drafted into the Navy. After receiving an honorable discharge in 1946, he opted not to return to Dailey Bros. Instead, he grabbed at the opportunity to frame a new circus—Buck Owens Wild West Circus—for partners Buck Owens and Si Rubens at the Springfield, Missouri, fairgrounds. "We built the whole three-ring show there," Smith remembered. "I had to do a little bit of everything. I had to secure the wagons; I had to buy the

trailers. I had a welding machine, and we did all the carpentry work at the fairgrounds."

When the circus hit the tanbark trail, Smith not only helped set up the circus but also sold tickets to the sideshow. In addition, he was a performer under the big top. Buck Owens was featured in the center ring with six liberty horses; Smith and Owens's wife worked an equal number in rings one and three. Charlie also substituted as a drummer in the big-show band, directed by Lee Atkins.

He stayed with the show—called Rogers Bros. from 1947 on—after 3½ seasons. He might have stayed longer had it not been for a personality conflict with a female on the show, who just happened to be Si Ruben's romantic interest at the time. "I couldn't get along with her," Smith laughed, "so I called it quits at the end of the 1948 season."



Charlie and Gene Verchiski.

Beware of Owner's Kin

Smith returned to Gonzales with his two sons and went to work for a parts supply store. Not finding the predictable life of a townier to his liking, Charlie joined up in the spring of 1949 with Dale Bros. Circus in South Carolina. Under Mickey Dale's ownership, the circus-like Dailey Bros. a grift show—was routed along the East Coast, playing inland dates in Pennsylvania and as far north as Connecticut. As lot boss and superintendent, Smith was responsible for laying out the lot and for putting up and taking down the big top—a push-pole tent (all the other shows he worked on deployed bale-ring tops).

For the first time, but not the last, Charlie found himself putting his own money into a show. When a new big top arrived C.O.D. from the United Tent Company at winter quarters, "Mickey Dale didn't have the money to pick it up, so I loaned him the money—I got my money back later."

In the meantime, perhaps as a sop for the loan, Dale gave Smith the pie car (circus diner) privilege. "Bob Kowan was the name of the guy who ran the pie car for me—you still remember when you get older, but sometimes it takes a minute longer," Smith laughed in one of his interviews with the writer.

In 1950, however, Smith once again found himself on the outs with the show owner. Dale brought in his brother Leo to take over concessions. Leo also insisted on taking over the pie car as well, Smith recalled. "So they let me go in the middle of the season."

Next Stop: Stevens Bros.

He jumped to another small three-ringer, Stevens Bros., owned by R. A. "Little Bob" Stevens and operated out of Hugo, Oklahoma. The November 4, 1950 *Billboard* noted that Smith was responsible for "public relations." While admitting that "once in a while I would give [Stevens] a little advice here and there," Charlie said in reality that he ran the pie car.

Smith's neighbor on the midway was a hop-scotching concessionaire, Bobby Hake, who sold novelties.

Charlie especially relished telling this jackpot about Hake. "Bobby had his concessions stand set up in Salmon, Idaho—it was the last town on that Salmon River. The light plant caught on fire, so they called the fire department. It had been raining, and the grounds were slick. When the fire truck came in, [the driver] slammed on his brakes and skidded sideways right into Bobby's concessions and knocked it completely down."

Billboard reported the incident, noting that Smith was rebuilding the demolished light plant. He completed the task two weeks later, Hall Ward recently told this writer. Hall, who had joined Steven Bros. just after the fire to take over the sideshow with partner Harry Leonard, said he was amazed how fast Charlie accomplished the rebuilding task. Smith remained with Stevens through the 1951 season, when he returned to Gonzales to open his own "beer joint." He also sold used appliances at another store.

From Tending Bar to Fleet Boss

The open road once again beckoned Smith in 1954. He was called by his brother-in-law, Paul Pyle, to assume his duties as boss canvasman on King Bros. Circus so that Pyle could return home to bury his father. "I went over there and took his place and moved the show for him."

Circus founder Floyd King had taken on a new partner, Arnold Maley, after his split with the Cristiani family, with whom he had fielded shows during the previous five seasons.

"It was a good-size show that year, but it wasn't nearly as big as it was in 1955. That was a BIG show!"

Moving a circus on 78 trucks—reputed to be the largest American show fleet ever—was to become the circus's Achilles' heel.

When the show left winter quarters at Macon, Georgia, that year, Smith was responsible for putting up and tearing down the sideshow canvas, a task he remembered fondly. The top had 50-foot round end sections with two 30-foot middle sections. "We doubled up the banner line on aluminum poles, with chains across the top and guy lines on

each pole."

The circus began experiencing problems before it entered Canada, where it had seen big business in 1949. "Actually, it was just the normal run of problems of keeping a motorized show on the road," Smith explained. "A major problem was finding 68 to 78 drivers each morning. We had a lot of double-back trips. We had a bus that doubled back drivers. Sometimes we'd be a little late for the matinee, getting their equipment in."

Lacking the wherewithal to maintain such a large fleet, the owners simply abandoned some 30 vehicles along its Canadian route. "They had problems at the border, because when you took a vehicle into Canada, you had to bring it out. The people at the border were wanting to know where these other trucks were."

Once King Bros. re-entered the U.S., Charlie was no longer able to simply observe the maintenance problems from his catbird seat in the sideshow. In frustration, the transportation superintendent had blown the show, and Smith inherited the Herculean responsibilities at midseason.

"It was nerve racking," he recalled. "What we had left was in pretty good shape. The guy that was in charge before was a good mechanic. We had a couple of good mechanics left. If they couldn't [repair a problem], we shopped the truck and got it fixed."

But the task of keeping the show moving with some of its rigs sidelined also took its toll on Smith. At the end of the 1955 season, Smith approached the King ticket wagon a final time. "Arnold Maley was in the office, and when I told him I was coming to get my salary," he said, "OK, Charlie. Wait just a minute." He paid me every penny he owed me. A lot of people didn't get their money."

Maley and King split the cash-depleted show into Eastern and Western units at the start of the 1956 season. Both units folded within weeks.

Earning "Chimp" Change

Meanwhile, Smith returned to Gonzales, Texas, where he was reunited with Ben Davenport on a small but highly profitable merchants' street circus.

"We'd find a place in town where they'd let us work right on the street; that's why you called it a street show. And then you'd set up a stage between two semis. We'd have the semis for dressing rooms. We had a novelty joint and a snow cone joint, and we'd set them up on the street."

Twice a day the roving enterprise staged two free performances. "Corky Plunkett [Norma Davenport's former husband] was the master of ceremonies. He did all the announcing. We had some good acts on the show. I had the chimp act. I worked that chimp for the privilege of having the novelty joint." The performances were not too long, "because there was no grift on the show." The street circus made its money off concessions and a few rides. "I think it was the only legitimate show that Ben ever ran," Smith chuckled.

Even though the Dailey Bros. lettering may have been painted on the truck cabs, Davenport avoided advertising

the show by its former title. "I think they picked some towns where the Dailey show played before," and the shrewd owner didn't want merchants to complain that "here's that grift show again." Still, "they'd never tell anybody where they were going next, you know."

Smith remained with Davenport until mid-season 1956. "I couldn't get along with Ben any longer, so I dropped off the street show and went to the Beatty show in the Carolinas."

Following Ringling show's legendary last stand under canvas at Pittsburgh on July 17, the Clyde Beatty Circus was the only remaining railroad circus—a distinction it would hold for only the next six weeks.

Smith joined the Walter Keirnan-managed outfit as a ticket-seller on the sideshow. But since he had a GMC fifth-wheel truck to pull his house trailer, he also took over a more important assignment. "I pulled wagons from the lot to the train, but I didn't help load the train. And I'd go overland " to the next lot.

Making His Biggest Jump

After the Beatty show closed in Sarasota in late November (its train was moved to new winter quarters at Deland where its cars would be sold off), Smith decided to take a well-earned rest. It lasted just long enough for him to bump into Art Concello.



Kitty and Charlie on their wedding day April 17, 1965.

Knowing of Smith's talents as a show builder and welder, Concello virtually ordered Smith to report to Eddie Billetti at the former high-wire walker's shop on Beneva Road. (Concello owned the shop site, Smith noted.)

"Art found a place to park my trailer out at Tommy Hart's on Fruitvale Road. I went out and talked to Billetti and made a deal to go to work for him. Eventually, they sent me to the winter quarters, where I opened up the carpenter shop and built the wardrobe boxes for them."

Charlie's skills were vital to Concello's strategy of eliminating the last remaining circus train for the next 3½ years in favor of largely transporting Ringling Bros. on the nation's expanding interstate superhighway system. By concentrating on lengthier engagements in larger cities, Ringling would henceforth bypass many communities where it had

previously played single-day stands. Further significant savings resulted from eliminating its canvas-era work force, whose union-inspired slowdowns and strikes had brought the show to its knees.

"Money was a little bit short when they were building the truck show," Smith recalled. "They had to cut corners. They had to borrow some money, and I don't know who all chipped in, but I'm sure that Bud Montgomery put some money in—he was a storekeeper in Sarasota and a buddy of Concello's."

Charlie on one of his train cars.

Twelve trucks and semi-trailers were repainted with the Ringling logo for this new venture. In addition, Concello leased four unmarked rail cars—three stocks for the animals and a sleeper—from the Pennsylvania Railroad. For the first time in many years, there was no designated trainmaster. In most cases, Smith recalled, the quartet of circus cars was simply hooked onto a passing freight train to be hauled to their next destination.

"I don't think anybody was in charge of the car that hauled people," Smith said. "The coach was a chair car; people didn't sleep much in those seats. The people that didn't have facilities stayed in motels. There were some house trailers, too," for performers, managers and workers.

Where the Greatest Show on Earth in its halcyon days under canvas claimed as many as 1600 employees, the 1957 edition numbered about 100, Smith recalled.

Tim Holan, Charlie, Tom Dillon and Peggy Williams. January 17, 2004 Ring of Fame induction.



Ringling did use its old train to carry the new show to its opening indoor dates at Madison Square Garden and Boston. Charlie remained behind at winter quarters to prepare the last two trucks for road duty. He was given the initial assignment of driving both trucks to Boston, where the circus caravan would take to the highways.

Back on the Road

Arriving with the first truck in Boston, Smith found his priorities changed. "I was supposed to drive back, pick up a semi in Atlanta, and bring it on to Sarasota, where we'd build in a sleeper. But Concello said to me, 'I need you to stay here and drive a truck to Providence,'" the first stop on the truck show's route.

Once in Providence, Smith's departure for winter quarters was delayed again. "Concello says, 'I want you to go to Rochester with me.'" From there Charlie drove a truck to the next

stand at Hershey, Pennsylvania, where he had to unhook his rig to rescue a stranded semi-trailer and cab.

Smith returned to the Hershey arena where Concello and General Manager Tuffy Genders were in the seats supervising the set up. "They hollered for me to come up there, and Concello says, 'Charlie, I'm going to give you these trucks.'

"And I said, 'I don't want these trucks,'" pointing out that he had left his clothes in his house trailer in Sarasota and that he was being forced to sleep at night in his truck cab.

Despite his protests, Smith received a spot promotion as transportation manager for Ringling Bros. for the remainder of the coast-to-coast tour. "So I moved that doggone show on trucks for the next 3½ years on trucks. I didn't have much trouble keeping drivers on that Ringling show. They mostly

were prop guys who had a pretty good job, and they got paid extra for driving."

The Ringling truck fleet was considerably smaller than the one he had overseen just two years earlier on the King show. "We had one straight job, a Mack truck that they had on the railroad show. It was a flatbed, and we made it a rubber mat truck by putting a roller on the back for the 6-by-20-foot straight piece for the buildings where you had to have something on the floor to protect it.

"The horses had rubber horse-shoes. The elephants could walk on the mat, too. We also put curved rubber mats in all the

rings" for the arena engagements.

"Wardrobe and prop wagons were closed semi trailers. Another was for rigging. It also carried the center poles that were telescoping quarter poles out of the old big top. We converted them for the outdoor rigging. They came apart in two pieces so that you could load them into a 20-foot trailer.

"In addition, we had a cookhouse truck.

"At this time there weren't enough buildings to keep the show going all the time, so we had to play some outdoor dates. The show was built where we could use the grandstands at fairgrounds or ballparks for seating. We set up the poles and rigging and everything over the rough part of the race track, or on the infield, and put on the show that way. The performers seemed to enjoy playing outdoors." Smith counted wire-walker Harold "The Great Alzana" Davis among his closest friends on the show.

In 1960, Smith took the trucks (with the separately-routed four rail cars) out of Sarasota for one last swing, which ended in Mexico City. The outfit returned a final time to its Sarasota in late June, at which time the leased cars, still brandishing only the logo of the Pennsylvania Railroad, were sent back to their owner.

Lloyd Morgan's Understudy

Awaiting the traveling performers and workers was a newly refurbished, 15-car train, proudly bearing the Ringling Bros. title. Lloyd Morgan and his crew had been readying the cars for the new consist, including four stock cars, six sleepers, four animal cars and a pie car. In addition, four of the 25 surplus hospital cars that the circus bought after World War II were converted into tunnel cars. "We had no flat cars on that train," Smith pointed out.

With the ends of the cars knocked out and the interiors gutted, the tunnel cars were designed to carry wagons, floats and tiger cages. "The wagons were all eight feet wide, which is standard. But some of the ceilings in the rounded cars were lower, so the wagons had to be made to fit in those tunnel cars," Smith explained. "They were designed so that a certain number of wagons would fit in each car. When the cars were fully loaded, there was no space left over.

"We had a crossbar that we put at both ends of each tunnel cars. Sometimes we had a little problem getting that crossbar in when the last wagon was loaded; that's how tight the wagons were in there."

Floats, tiger cages and a 20-foot shop wagon also were built to fit into the tunnel cars. They were snugly loaded side by side with the regular wagons.

Smith cited three primary reasons for the circus's return to rails: Ringling's financial position had improved, thanks to the cost-cutting measures. "The show was getting bigger, and they wanted to increase the size of the performance"; and "They could handle the people better on the train than they could by going overland with trailers and automobiles." Some performers and support vehicles continued to travel by highway.

To Smith's disappointment, Deacon Blanchard was the designated trainmaster when the newly assembled train pulled out of Sarasota in August to play the remainder of the 1960 season. But the duties of the soon-to-retire Blanch-



Willis Lawson, Charlie and Gunther Williams. Celebrity Night 1998 at the Ringling Circus Museum.

field, were limited to moving the train from point to point. Charlie, as transportation boss, not only supervised the movement of wagons from the train to the building, but also the train loading and unloading process. Although he traveled for the first time on the train, he also continued to oversee the remaining trucks that moved overland.

"I was ready to go out as trainmaster, but I'm glad I didn't," Smith admitted years later. "I learned much more about it after going on the road."

At the conclusion of the 1960 dates, the Ringling train pulled into its new winter quarters in Venice, some 20 miles south of Sarasota. With Blanchfield's retirement, Lloyd Morgan became trainmaster. "I learned a lot from Mr. Morgan," Smith said. "He was one of the old-timers. He took pains trying to teach people how to tie the wagons down and how to move the equipment back and forth from the train to the buildings."

Ultimate Job: Trainmaster

In 1966, when Morgan was promoted to general manager for the separate Ringling European touring unit, Smith took over command of the U.S.-routed circus train.

By the time brothers Irvin and Israel Field and Judge Roy Hofheinz assumed ownership of the nation's largest circus in late 1967, the 15-car show train had grown to 40 cars.

In the meantime, the circus rail fleet numbered approximately 50 cars, with the 25 original surplus hospital cars being supplemented by a series of flat cars ordered from St. Louis Car Company.

Smith told the writer of his biographical sketch for CFA Tent 131 that when he was appointed trainmaster, he



Charlie and Kitty Smith.

obtained all the books available on railroading in preparation for the job. As a result, "I hardly ever had any problems with the railroads" that were contracted to pull the circus consist.

His new assignment made him responsible for getting the train—and its precious cargo of humans, animals and performing apparatus—to each city in a safe and expeditious manner. His passengers included two legendary kinkers, clown Lou Jacobs, and wild-animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams, the German superstar around whom the newly-created Red unit was built in 1968.

To gain the respect of the railroad crews, Charlie learned their terminology and methods. "You had to talk a little railroad—things like switching and cuts in the train—so that they'd understand that you knew what you were talking about."

Like trainmasters before and after him, Smith added operating efficiencies. "I invented some things, like carrying extra sets of wheels under the car, which they're still doing on the Red show," Smith told this writer. In 1975, "I made saddles that went underneath the coaches, which didn't have a possum belly in the way. I would fasten these to the main frame of the coaches and then take a forklift and put a set of wheels on them. I had the railroad inspectors come and look at them, and they okayed it. So we've been using it ever since" on the Red unit train.

Smith also shaved off time during the loading process by efficiently organizing these operations. Here's where his skills as a mathematician came into play.

As the circus wagons arrived at the rail siding following the final performance in each city, Smith served as a traffic cop, lining the wagons in proper loading order. They were arranged not only by wagon number—those in the 30 series, for example, consisted of wardrobe and trunks while those in lower sequences included props and ring curbs—but also by wagon length. Some wagons measured 16 feet, other 20 feet in length.

Since each flat car was 96 feet long, "you just automati-

cally knew how many 20s and how many 30s would fit on a flat."

To accelerate the train-loading process, Smith also devised a two-wheel dolly to give the crew more leverage in moving the wagons down the flats. "Those wagons had such a short tongue that we had to pole the wagons. I made a two-wheel thing with a pin on it" to enable a long pole to be attached to the tongue.

"When we poled down to the end of the flat where the wagon was supposed to be tied down, we took the dolly down and put it off the flat and onto the ground. And a Jeep or a Clark [tractor] would tow it back to the front end," he explained.

Charlie shared a large stateroom on one of the coaches with his wife Kitty, who he met in 1960 in Sarasota and married in New York in 1965. Kitty became a wardrobe mistress on the Red unit. That stateroom was the control center while the circus train was en route. Via two-way radio, he gave instructions to the constantly changing train engineers—many becoming Smith's friends. The engineer on each leg of the rail journey, in turn, was responsible for maintaining contact with the conductor in the caboose.

On arriving at the next rail yard, the engineer would hand off the two-way radio to the switch crew engineer, and Smith would discuss how to cut up the train for unloading.

Once this operation was completed, the trainmaster and his six-man crew took up maintenance activities on rail sidings—checking brake shoes and making needed repairs on the rolling stock.

He became a mentor to many on the crew, which included his older son, Ron. "During an engagement," Smith recalled, "I kept the crew busy doing something on the train all the time. You've got to be congenial with your help or you'll lose them all, and then you're stuck with no help to load and unload."

Smith's Star Pupil

One of the new hires on the Ringling train in 1977 was 14-year-old Tim Holan, a runaway from Pittsburgh, who was cleaning sleepers when he came to Smith's attention. According to an article published in the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe employee magazine in 2000, Holan credited Charlie and Kitty for taking him under their wings and giving him encouragement. Under Smith's tutelage, Holan at age 17 was named assistant trainmaster. He had barely turned 20 in 1981 when he was promoted to trainmaster upon Smith's retirement from active road duty.

"In the beginning, there were daily calls to Charlie in Florida," Holan wrote. "I had so many questions." The new train boss also counted himself fortunate to have inherited Charlie's network of railroad relationships. "Those relationships are so important," Holan said. "When our train comes to a yard, we are not part of their schedule. So it helps to have a good rapport with railroad employees."

Although the Red unit train never suffered a derailment during Smith's tenure, the affable trainmaster was called on to assist the sister Blue unit in the late 1970s. Eight coach-

es on the Blue unit were derailed in rural Indiana. Performers and workers were transferred by bus to Toledo, Ohio—the next stand—where they were housed in local hotels. The rail fleet was pulled to Amtrak's mammoth train yards at Bridge Grove, Indiana, for repairs.

Smith was taken off the Red train, which was en route to Salt Lake City, to oversee the rescue mission. Once on site he quickly obtained two truckloads of wheels. The crew replaced some 40 wheels on the coaches, and the train proceeded to Toledo to reload its cargo at the end of that date.

Charlie in front of one of his cars.

Even when Charlie went into semi-retirement in 1981, his services continued in demand. At times he was still working six days a week at the Venice yards, helping to recycle and refurbish circus train cars.



"Bill Misiura was buying cars for us, and then he'd bring them down so that we could whip them out for service."

Assisting Smith in this task was Manuel "Junior" Ruffin, an ex-performer and boss canvasman, who had been trainmaster on Ringling's short-lived Monte Carlo unit in 1978.

In 1992 Charlie followed the recycling work to the Feld Enterprises' new location in Palmetto, between Sarasota and Tampa. He took a well deserved final retirement in 1995.

Reminiscing at his home in Nokomis during a 2002 interview with this writer, Smith said his tenure as trainmaster was the crowning culmination of his multi-faceted circus experiences. "I enjoyed every minute of it. After all, it is the Greatest Show on Earth. And when you make it up the ladder that far, I think that's about as good as you can do."

Kitty Smith died May 21, 2009 in Venice, Florida.

Help Wanted!

I am researching the 1954 edition of the Ringling circus in detail and need assistance in all areas but particularly:

The unique "Haitian Primitive" Bill Ballantine artwork (as opposed to the jungle motif) that appeared on the menagerie cages only in 1954.

Interior views of any tents

Sideshow and midway artwork

Anything you would be willing to share, sell, scan, copy or loan in terms of slides, photos, films, or memories would be greatly appreciated. Images of the 1954 cages in the open positions are particularly rare and color views basically unknown. Being opened only when inside the end of the big top would have made photography difficult. Those photos that have appeared in print probably show the most unusual and stylized menagerie artwork in the history of the American circus. Here's hoping that all of Mr. Ballantine's artwork of that season can be preserved in some way.

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SHRINE CIRCUS--R.I.P. ?

By John H. McConnell

This paper was originally presented at the 2008 Circus Historical Society Convention in Springfield, Massachusetts.

A few months ago CHS President, Robert Sabia, suggested I provide an update on Shrine circuses. It had been ten years since my book on its history was published. I agreed and began to search for an appropriate title. My first inclination was Shrine Circus-R.I.P. That seemed appropriate based on my perceptions of their current condition. However, the events of the past few months have caused me to reconsider. Perhaps there is still an opportunity for the Shrine circus to remain a viable entertainment format, so I changed the title by adding a question mark-Shrine Circus R.I.P.?

My concerns for the health of the Shrine circus are based on several factors.

Fewer

There are far fewer Shrine circuses today than there once were. In 1971 *Amusement Business* reported 132 Shrine temples (Shrine temple is the name of a local Shrine organization) held annual circuses, and an additional 173 Shrine clubs and related Shrine organizations sponsored circuses. Whatever today's number is, it is much smaller. I personally know of five temples that have discontinued their circuses in just the past three years.

Shorter

A 1970 *Amusement Business* article reported that Shrine circuses (excluding those conducted by Shrine clubs) averaged 4 days in length. The ones that still exist tend to be much shorter. The average is probably now closer to 2 days. Seventeen day circuses have become 5 day circuses. One week circuses have become weekend circuses, and weekend circuses have become one day circuses.

Lower Attendance

Shorter engagement lengths have not reduced attendance. Rather a reduction in attendance has led to the shortening of engagements. Shows that boasted audiences of between 80% and 100% capacity now are lucky to have half their seats occupied, and school performances that once accounted for well attended weekday matinees are now rare events.

Less Profitable

Circus costs have gone up and income (due to lower attendance) has gone down. The result is less profit, and profit is the primary reason a Shrine temple conducts circuses. At one time most Shrine temples received the majority of their annual income from two sources: membership dues and the circus. Today the temples look to bingo, room rentals and onion sales for their income since both dues and circus income are down. When their circuses do not contribute income, there is no longer a reason for sponsoring them.

In 1986, the Shrine created an organization to assist temples in promoting their circuses: SCANA (Shrine Circus Association of North

America). As the circus has become less important and other sources of income are sought, that organization changed its name and focus. It is now Shrine Circus and Fund Raising Association.

Less Performance

Many temples have reacted by attempting to reduce operating costs rather than increase attendance. In many cases that has led to less entertaining performances. One recent Shrine circus of some 2 hours and 40 minutes included in its 18 displays: two concession pitches, three Shrine clown numbers and ten minutes of Shrine introductions. Not exactly the fast moving, exciting type of performance desired by today's audiences.

One only has to compare a program of a recent Shrine circus with one for the same circus 30 years ago to see what has happened. Here are statistical comparisons of the performances for one Shrine circus:

	1980	2007
Displays	22	16
Animal Acts	12	5
Productions	4	1
Multi Ring Displays	12	5
Flying Acts	2	1
Band Size	14	2
Shrine Clown Numbers	0	2
Pitches During Performance	1	3

There is also an increasing shortage of acts. In 1971 *Amusement Business* estimated that Shrine circuses provided work for a minimum of 3000 acts each year. That is certainly not the case today. In addition many performers have left the business, so there is not as large a talent pool from which to create new and exciting performances.

Moslem temple members mill around before the show at the Detroit Shrine. Author's collection.





The Hanneford-produced spec in the 1981 Detroit Shrine show. Author's collection.

Outdated/"Old Fashion" Formats

Audience tastes have changed, but many Shrine circus producers have not. One producer told me, "We change our show every year. This year we have a different cat act, a different dog act, a different juggler and a different flying act." Maybe so, but 75% of his 2007 performers were on the show the previous year, and changing the flying act, dog act, juggler and cat act only means something to circus fans. To the general public all cat acts, dog acts, jugglers and flying acts appear similar.

Adding to this is a tendency to rigidly adhere to a program format from the 1950's. Many producers continue to open the show with a slow cat act and produce performances nearing three hours in length. Why open with the act? Because they have always done so, and because having the cat act first makes it easier to set up and tear down. Why three hours in length? Because every act a performer can do is included in the performance whether it fits or not. Yet surveys of today's audiences indicate a show needs to start with high energy; about two hours is the desired length; and quality is better than quantity.

A survey of audience members as they left a Shrine circus in 2000 produced the following information about the performance:

Poorest Circus Features

- Intermission too long 56%
- Too many commercials (pitches) 47%
- Show too long 44%
- Performance started late 42%
- Unnecessary Shrine Ceremonies 40%
- Concession Prices too High 38%
- Poor Clowns (Shrine Clowns) 22%
- Slow Moving - No Excitement 18%
- Dirty Building 13%

The actual statistics for that performance were:

- Intermission Length 58 minutes
- Number of Pitches In Performance 4
- Show Length 2 hours 52 minutes
- Actual Performance Started 20 minutes late
- Shrine Ceremonies 18 minutes

Another question asked on that survey was, "Is it likely that you will attend the circus next year?" Yes 17% No 39% Maybe 44%.

And, there are also other factors not directly related to Shrine circuses that have an impact.

Declining Shrine Membership

Shrine membership is declining, but this is not unique to that organization. Many fraternal groups are experiencing the same problem. The Shrine was created in 1871 by a group of 13 New York masons as an organization for fellowship and fun. By 1979 it had almost 1,000,000 members, but by 2007 membership had declined to just over 400,000.

Animal Concerns

Although much of the public rejects PETA's approach, there is an increasing concern about the use of animals for entertainment.

Newspaper ad for the 1942 Detroit Shrine. Pfening Archives.

SHRINE CIRCUS

State Fair Coliseum

Feb. 16-Mar. 1

2 Shows Daily 2 P. M.
8 P. M.

Capt. Terrell Jacobs . . . 32 Lions, Tigers

Elephants, Horses
Ponies, Dogs, Monkeys
Camels, Seals, Bears

"KING"
Only Wire Walking
Lion in World

NEW SHOW
COMICAL CLOWNS
LAUGHS, THRILLS

RESERVED SEATS ON SALE NOW

55c-83c-\$1.10 (Tax Incl.)

BOX OFFICE SHRINE CLUB

Gen'l Adm.
Ticket Necessary

OPEN DAILY 9 A. M. to 9 P. M.

TE. 1-7600

FREE SUPERVISED PARKING

purposes. Accompanying this has been the decline in available animal acts. For those wanting to see performing animals, there are fewer in circuses, and for those concerned about animal rights, they don't want to see any animal acts.

Increased Competition

At one time the circus was a major event. It was one of the few annual holidays. However, in those days it faced little competition. Today there are numerous arena shows: the Muppets, ice shows, Monster Trucks, Motorcycle Thrill Shows and elaborate concerts such as KISS. In addition, many of today's youngsters seem to prefer staying at home with their computer games.

Changing Audience Tastes

Numerous studies have identified changing audience tastes in entertainment. Audiences want fast moving, high energy performances. They want shorter performances. They want to be enter-

Shrine Circus

February 1 to 14, 1937-Coliseum, State Fair Grounds



The FEATURE ATTRACTION
in the low-price field is the
1937 FORD V-8

Program for the 1937 Detroit Shrine show. Pfening Archives.

tained. They do not equate circuses with sporting events that include vendors selling in the seats during a performance. They see a circus as a performance to be enjoyed without distractions.

Decline in Circus as Popular Entertainment

All this has led to a general decline the public's view of circus. Even the non-Shrine circuses are experiencing difficulties, and there are fewer of them each year. Only those shows that have recognized the needs of today's audiences and attempted to meet those needs have found a niche, including Big Apple Circus, Uni-verSoul Circus and Cirque du Soleil, and there are a few Shrine circuses that continue to prosper. They are the ones that have provided consistent quality entertainment and have adjusted to changing audience tastes.

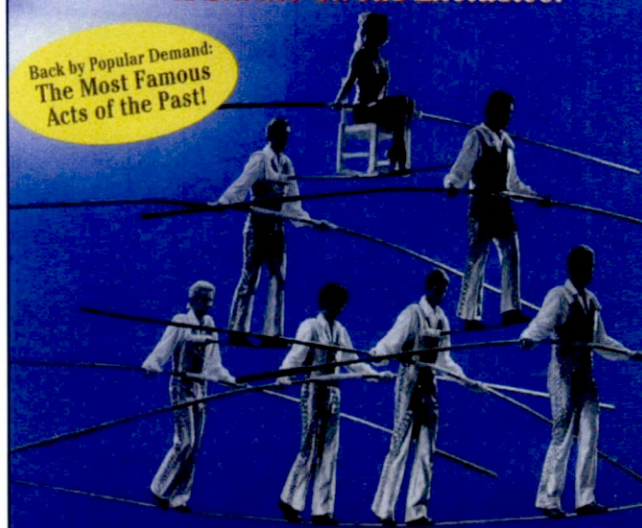
But back to the Shrine circus. In 1983 when I began to write the

THE REPEAT PERFORMANCE THE WORLD'S BEEN WAITING

The Flying Wallenda

— A Shrine Circus Exclusive! —

Back by Popular Demand:
The Most Famous
Acts of the Past!



The Shrine Circus

90th Year Gala Celebration

March 6-22
at the State Fair Coliseum

Hamid poster for the 1998 Detroit Shrine. Author's collection.

history of the Shrine circus, I decided to tell its story through Moslem Shrine Temple Circus in Detroit, Michigan. It was the first and oldest continuing Shrine circus. It was the largest. For years it had been performing for 17 to 21 days with 40 some performances in an 8,000 seat arena, and almost everything that occurred with Shrine circuses, occurred first at Moslem's Circus.

In Detroit the Shrine circus was *the* circus. It regularly outdrew Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Other circuses that tried to play the Detroit market generally did poorly and only appeared for a few years. Moslem Temple's attendance (in its better days) was between 150,000 and 200,000. It was not uncommon to have an operating profit of \$500,000.

Moslem Temple was also the first to develop a satellite program. At the conclusion of its annual circus a single ring version played one-day stands in surrounding communities--usually to full houses.

Another factor contributing to its success was the reputation of the Shrine in Detroit. It was excellent. The public knew of its existence and its philanthropy, and they supported both. It was not



The Wallendas seven high at Detroit. Author's collection.

remained

uncommon to hear someone say, "I prefer taking my children to the Shrine circus since the money goes for a good cause."

The first Moslem Shrine circus was present in February 1906. Its objectives were to:

- Raise money for the Temple
- Provide an activity for its members
- Improve and increase the public's knowledge of the Shrine

That first circus was a single ring affair presented in downtown Detroit's Light Guard Armory. It was a success, so it was continued, off and on, for the next 15 years. However, in 1920 it encountered a problem.

All Shriners are masons, and in 1920 the head of the masons in Michigan, known as the grand master, issued an order that masons could not participate in any activity that included gambling and games of chance. This was a problem for the Shrine circus.

Although the circus performance was the main attraction, the event included carnival games, games of chance and raffles. Without income from these, the temple did not feel there would be adequate profit, and 1920 was not a good time for lower profits. It was a time when the temple's financial needs were increasing.

Shriners had long been known for their antics. Their annual parades and conventions usually included a great deal of "little boy" activities. Joy buzzers, electric shock sticks and canes with air hoses at their tips for blowing an unsuspecting woman's skirt over her head were typical accessories, and many of their activities were preceded by consumption of so called "Camel's Milk." Or in the common vernacular—alcoholic beverages.

At the 1920 Shrine Imperial Session, the annual convention, the need for improving their image was discussed. The remedy selected was to develop a philanthropy. They selected hospitals for crippled children. These hospitals were to provide totally

free treatment for all children under 18. Their construction and operation required money, and the temples were asked for significant contributions.

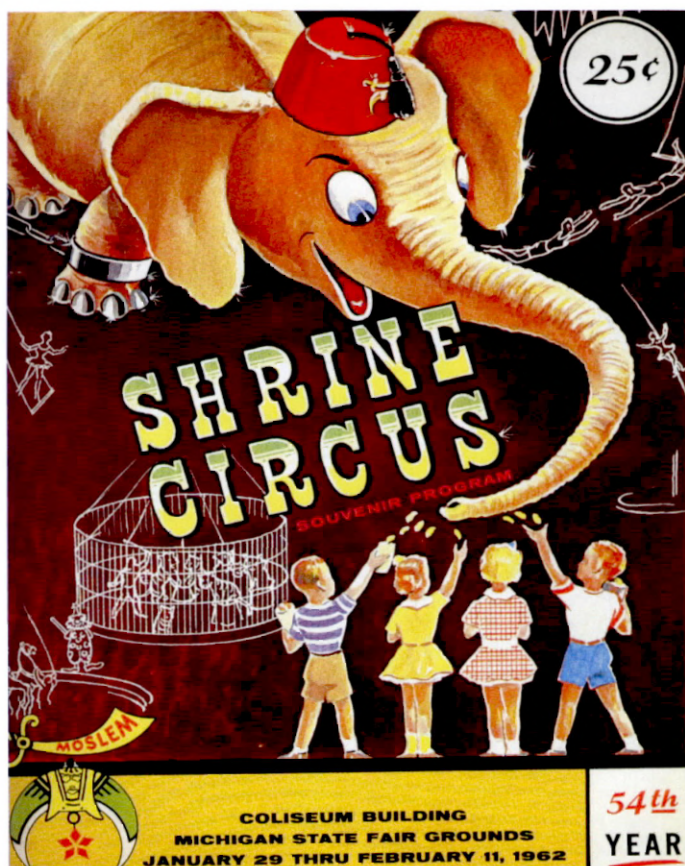
The Shrine had also been growing in membership, and accompanying that growth was the need for larger club quarters. In Detroit a new Masonic Temple was being constructed and adjoining it was to be a masque-Shrine club.

So in 1920, the temple's financial needs were increasing, and one of their major sources was income was threatened. Their solution was to move the circus to larger quarters—an arena that seated more people and would take a full three ring circus. This would allow for greater ticket and concession income, making income from games of chance unnecessary. Luckily the fair grounds in Detroit had just constructed such a building, called the Coliseum, so in 1920 the Shrine circus moved to this new facility and remained there until 2002.

It was at the Coliseum that Moslem's circus developed into a highly successful and profitable event. Contributing to that growth and success was a consistency of operation. From 1925 through 1978, it appeared the same two weeks in February each year. Their Shrine circus chairman

Producer Orrin Davenport, Antoinette Concello and Detroit Shrine chairman Tunis Edward Stinson.





The program of the 1962 Detroit Shrine produced by Al Dobritch. Pfening Archives.

unchanged for several years (except for one year), and during that period there were only three circus producers (again except for one year).

In 1978, the circus producer for the previous decade died, and the next year the Shrine's circus chairman was not re-appointed. From that point onward the circus was no longer treated as a business. Instead it became another Shrine activity.

Each year a temple elects its officers for the next year. The potentate (or president as he is now called) is the chief officer. For all practical purposes the potentate is just about omnipotent for his one year in office.

After 1979, each potentate selected his own circus chairman, producer and dates. The consistency of circus operation was gone, and the circus began to suffer. One year the performance would be excellent and the next, poor. Also by constantly changing chairman, there was no one with consistent experience guiding the operation. The circus moved from a profitable business to a political football, and all this was occurring as Detroit's population and audience tastes were changing.

As circus income began to decline, elephant rides and concessions became more important to the Shrine since they produced addition revenue. Intermissions were extended to allow for more time for these activities and pitches were inserted



Clown Tad Toske and Eddie Stinson in 1935 on the Ringling lot. Pfening Archives.

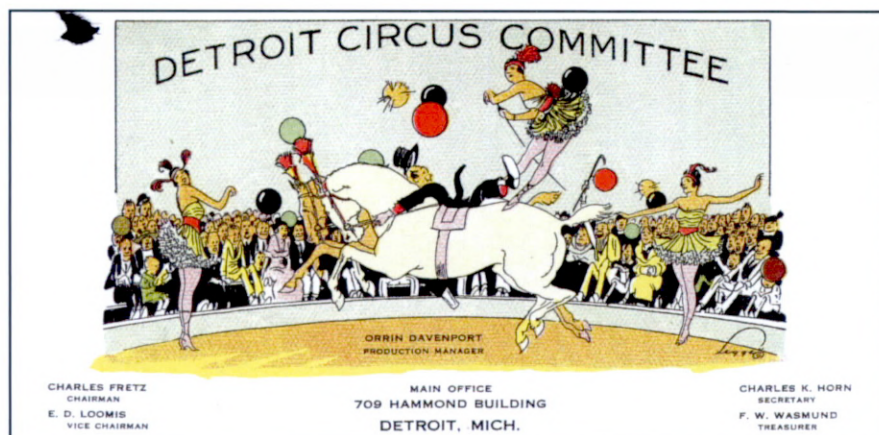
into the performances. Such actions did not please the majority of the public and further contributed to drops in attendance. (In 1997 an intermission ran over 1 hour. By the time it concluded over a third of the audience had left—probably not to return the following year, and due to the long intermission, the performance lasted over three and one half hours.)

The temple recognized they needed to do something to regain their audience. But what?

In 1962 at the Detroit Shrine Circus the Wallendas fell from the high wire while performing their seven person pyramid. Two members of the act were killed, and three seriously injured. The accident received worldwide press, and except for one occasion the Wallendas never performed the seven person pyramid again.

The State Fairgrounds Coliseum, long time home of the Detroit Shrine.





Group of Detroit Shrine Circus Letterheads, dating (from top to bottom) from 1983, 1920s, 1948, and early 1950s. Pfening Archives.

(Actually, in 1993, the possibility of having the Wallendas recreate the act at the Detroit show was discussed but did not materialize.)

For the 1998 Detroit Shrine it was decided to have the Wallendas recreate their seven person pyramid as the main feature of that year's circus. Circus professionals assisted in framing the marketing and advertising campaign with the Wallendas as the center piece. However, a few days before the circus was to open, the Shrine decided that was the wrong approach. They felt the advertising should feature elephants and clowns. After considerable discussion, they reluctantly agreed to continue with the Wallenda

advertising.

On opening night the Coliseum was filled to capacity. Moreover, there were 14 national and local television and newspaper reporters on hand. The next day over 1,000 stories appeared world wide in print and on television, and the engagement was one of the best attended the Shrine had experienced.

So what did the Shrine do for the following year's circus? They changed their chairman. They changed the producer, and they changed the advertising agency. Even worse they returned to the same format that had lost them attendance, so the audience they had regained with the 1998 circus again left.

By 2001, they again recognized the need to recapture their audience, but there was no Wallenda recreation to bring in the customers. One suggestion was to stage an old time circus street parade, and then have the wagons on display at the circus. Circus World Museum furnished 10 wagons with horses. Bands were contracted. Shrine units, and animals and performers from the circus participated.

The parade helped, and the engagement was a success although not as great as the year the Wallendas recreated their seven person pyramid. So did the Shrine capitalize on their returned audience?

Keep in mind the years of the show's greatest success were when there was consistency in operation:

Recognized Identity (Brand Name and Franchise).

Same location (Coliseum at the State Fairgrounds).

Same Time Each Year (First Two Weeks of February).

Quality Performance.

No Potentate Involvement.

Same Circus Chairman Each Year.

Circus Producer Created Performance.

Multi-Year Producer.

But for the 2002 circus the potentate:

Moved the circus north to the Silverdome in Pontiac—a covered football stadium.

Changed the dates to the end of May and early June.

Reduced the engagement to five days.

Increased from three rings to five rings.

They even changed the name of the show to "SHRINE CIRCUS EXTREME." Making matters worse the dates selected followed the Royal Hanneford Circus's annual appearance at the Auburn Hills Palace just a short distance from the Silverdome; they were close to Universoul Circus annual appearance in Detroit; and another circus had just played the Shrine's former circus dates at the Coliseum.

The results? They went from a profitable circus in 2001 to a \$750,000 loss in 2002.

The next few years, the Shrine sponsored tent circuses, and con-

tinued to change dates and locations. They moved from north of Detroit to south of the city. The results were as expected. The audiences and profits continued to shrink, and in 2007 although they had contracted another tent show, they canceled it. One former potentate said, "Moslem is out of the circus business."

In 2008, circus producer Tarzan Zerbini approached Moslem Temple with a plan for a 2008 circus. He suggested: Returning to the Coliseum and late winter/or early spring dates. Shortening the number of days and performances. Having circus professionals promote the show. Going to one ring—quality over quantity.

But most important of all, Zerbini would retain full control by financing the show. The Shrine was guaranteed no loss. Zerbini would pay the Shrine a percentage for use of its name and its assistance. Moslem accepted the proposition and appointed as its chairman a former chairman of their most successful circuses. The show did well and made money, and it was rescheduled for 2009.

The future of Shrine circuses depends on their ability to overcome:

- Declining Shrine Membership.
- Lack of Innovation.
- Outdated Performance Formats.
- The Public's Animal Concerns.
- Inconsistency in Operation.
- Increases in Competition.
- General Decline in the Public's Interest in Traditional Circus.

Can that be done? The answer is, yes. One producer increased attendance annually at his Shrine circuses by: Producing performances with high energy openings.

The cover of the 1940 Detroit Shrine program. Pfening Archives.

Stressing quality over quantity.

Limiting intermissions to 20 minutes.

Starting on time. Holding Shrine ceremonies ahead of the performance.

Using only professional clowns or Shrine clowns under the direction of professional clowns.

Eliminating all pitches during the performance.

Limiting performance to no more than 2 hours and



Right this way, Ladies and Gentlemen, for the Big Tent and the Ford V-8—the ride sensation of 1940. Bigger, better than ever before. Now, as always, Detroit's favorite car!

FORD V-8

SHRINE CIRCUS

DETROIT

T. E. STINSON,
Chairman

PHONE—Glendale 7606

New York City, March 9th 1932

Mr. Jess Adkins,
Hagenbeck - Wallace Circus,
Peru, Indiana,

Dear Jess:-

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your wonderful co-operation with the dates just finished, everything was handled fine by your people, the show all made money as you know, I have not received a report from Ben Groenewold as yet, but I think he will come out okay.

Enclose will please find check for transportation from Peru to Detroit, if everything is not correct Jess let me know, I wish you would thank Mr. McFarlin and Cheereful Gardner as they were both 100% with us. Trusting we can do business again next year, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Orrin Davenport
Forrest Hotel,
New York City.

Orrin Davenport's letter of appreciation to Jess Adkins for help in the 1932 Detroit Shrine show. The Ben Groenewold referred to above was the Toledo, Ohio Shrine Circus Chairman. Pfening Archives.

15 minutes.

Eliminating any Shrine involvement in the production or operation of the performance.

Perhaps Moslem's circus and the other Shrine circuses may again collectively become one of the largest entertainment events in America. However, after only one successful year, Shrine politics have already raised its head in Detroit. Members of Moslem Temple have been heard to say: "Why is Zerbini making the most money? We [Shrine] should."

"There are other venues that are cheaper."

Zerbini has too much control."

Zerbini's getting too big a percentage."

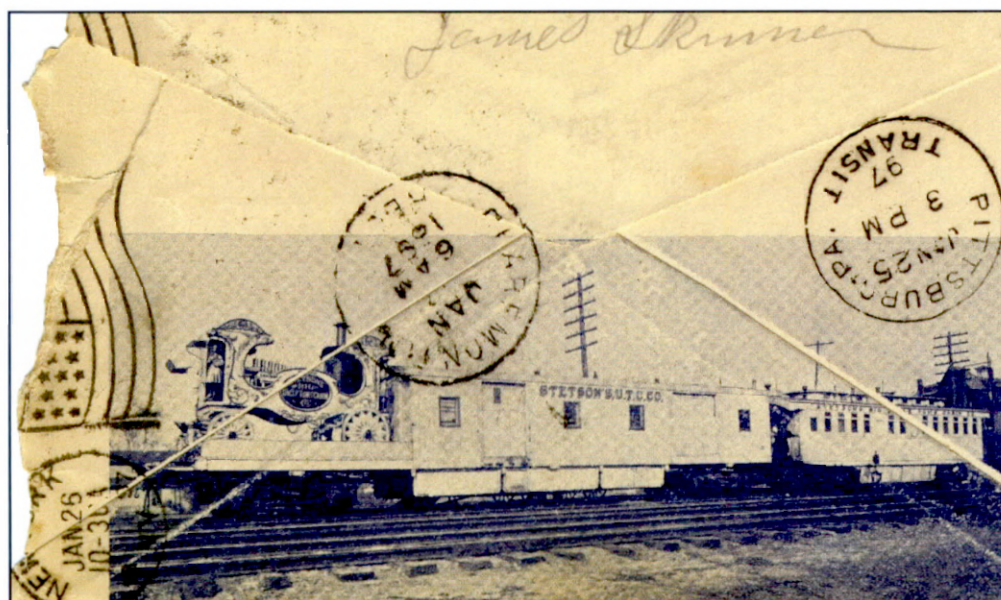
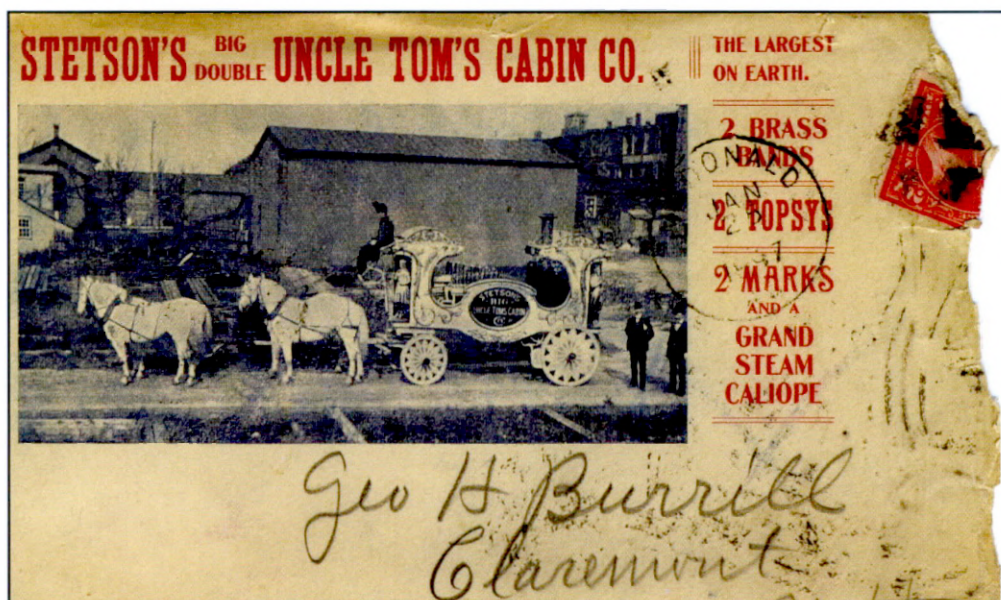
The Shrine may again be its own worst enemy. Its members should consider the wording on a plaque that hung on the wall Houston's Arabia Temple Shrine Circus Director: "The Shrine is our fun. The hospitals are our philanthropy. The circus is our business. Don't screw with out business."

Bill Kasiska's Letterheads

Leon W. Washburn spent his life in small-time show business. Starting on his father's field show in the 1850s, he owned a circus on and off from 1881 to 1908, sometimes with partners, but usually on his own. During at least the 1890s he and George P. Stetson toured an Uncle Tom's Cabin show during the fall and winter. In the 1910s he got into the carnival business, and in the 1920s he owned a theater. In 1931 Walter L. Main wrote to *Billboard* that Washburn always made money with his Tom show, only to lose it with his circus.

This letterhead dates from 1899. Like many showmen, Washburn used a lithograph company as a drop box, in this case the Donaldson Company near Cincinnati. His performance must have been interesting in because it included both black and white actors, cake walkers, and a "colored lady drum & bugle corps." The presence of the cake walkers and the drum and bugle corps was an indication that the presentation was not a literal interpretation of Mrs. Stowe's novel.

Washburn also proclaimed he had the best street parade "given by any Opera House attraction." If indeed he did, it was in large measure because he leased the former Great Forepaugh Show steam calliope. This wagon began life on Adam Forepaugh's circus in 1880, and in the early 1890s it was purchased by former leaper Fred R. Castle. Castle leased the wagon to circuses, carnivals, wild west shows, and Tom shows at least through 1911. This Stetson envelope dates from early 1897. Its back side is particularly noteworthy for the company's use of a hybrid flat-baggage car.



THE LARGEST UNCLE TOM'S CABIN CO. TRAVELING.



TWO BRASS BANDS WHITE AND COLORED,
EVA'S GOLDEN CHARIOT,
COLORED LADY DRUM & BUGLE CORPS,
GENUINE CAKE WALKERS,
BUCK AND WING DANCERS,
PACK OF BLOOD HOUNDS,
2 TOPSEYS, 2 FUNNY MARKS AND
A GRAND TRANSFORMATION SCENE.
THE FINEST STREET PARADE GIVEN BY ANY
OPERA HOUSE ATTRACTION.

PERMANENT ADDRESS
c/o DONALDSON
127 EAST 8TH ST. CINCINNATI, O.

Amsterdam Oct 29th 1899

Mr U H Painter

Dear Sir

Am looking for a letter every day
from Mr Blume regards Martin's
late. will let you know soon as I hear
McClure find contracts for West Chester

Yours Respt

Leon W Washburn

Dan Castello and the Railroad Circus

By Stuart Thayer

For many years the accepted wisdom was that the 1872 P. T. Barnum Circus was the first to be mounted on rails. Recent research has discovered that this is not true. The parameters as to what constitutes a railroad-mounted circus should be agreed upon in order to facilitate discussion. For the purposes of this paper "railroad-mounted" indicates that the arena, the menagerie, the sideshows, the personnel, the parade equipment and the horses all rode the rails.

This description eliminates such early attempts as the 1856 Spalding and Rogers' New Railroad Circus, and L. B.

Lent's 1866 New York Circus, as neither of them carried a menagerie. In the *New York Clipper* pre-season rosters it was not usual to list sideshow personnel until the 1870s. This was so because early sideshows were usually one of the "privileges," and not owned by the circus owners.

As is well-known, the 1872 Barnum show was a partnership between Barnum, W. C. Coup, and Dan Castello. Barnum and Coup each claimed that going on rails was his idea. Neither of them had any prior railroad experience. Yet, when we look at the list of rail-mounted circuses before 1872, Dan Castello's name is on five of them.

We will grant that having one's name listed as one of the principals of a rail operation doesn't necessarily translate into knowledge of circus railroading, but to be a part of five such endeavors, and not assimilate some of the necessary rituals would seem to be impossible.

In a search of newspaper references to Castello on the Internet we found three interviews, none of which concerned railroading directly. One, from Syracuse, New York, his boyhood home, dealt with the early days of tented shows, another, in the *Atlanta Constitution*, referred to opposition with Thayer and Noyes, and the third told of the adoption of two rings on the Barnum show in 1873. Even the papers from Racine, Wisconsin, where he lived as an adult, contained no interviews.

Castello's railroad experience began in 1865 when he was thirty-three years old, and had been performing since 1850. His 1864 circus, a wagon show, wintered in Little Rock, Arkansas, opening the 1865 season in Natchez, Mississippi. The title was "Dan Castello's Great Show," one of seven titles it carried in 1865.

Newspaper ad in the 23 June 1865 *Nashville Dispatch*. Author's collection.

**HOWES & CASTELLO'S
GREAT CIRCUS.**
ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW TROUPE.



**WILL OPEN IN NASHVILLE, FOR THREE
days only, on Market street, just below
the Louisville Depot.**
Monday, June 26.
Tuesday, June 27.
Wednesday, June 28.

Commence at 3 1/4 and 6 o'clock P. M.
Admission 75 cents. Children 50 cents.
This Company intend performing at
Gallatin, Thursday, June 29th.
Franklin, Friday, June 30th.
Bowling Green, Saturday, July 1st.
During the afternoon performances, the cele-
brated carriage lately belonging to the Queen of
England will be exhibited. June 22-1w

In the days before lithographs were common, newspaper advertisements and heralds were the main source of announcing the pending arrival of a circus, and the verbiage often varied from city to city. This was because the newspaper determined the spacing and the type face of the ad, although the advance agent provided the ad content. This method left a great deal of latitude to both the agent and the paper, and often there were changes from ad to ad.

In the case of the Castello show, it was "Dan Castello's Great Show" until 25 June 1865 when it became "Howes and Castello." This may signal the sale of the show to Seth B. Howes, who already owned the "Howes European," which was in Indiana at the time. The Castello circus became "Howes and Castello's Great Circus" in Nashville on 26 June. Castello was the manager.

From then until the end of 1865, the company carried six

Top part of ad from Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, 5 June 1869. Author's collection.

different titles in its newspaper ads. They were: "Dan Castello's Circus and Horse Show" in Kentucky; "Howes and Castello" in Atlanta; "Dan Castello's Great Circus" in Augusta, Georgia; "S. B. Howes and Dan Costello" in Columbus, Georgia; "S. B. Howes' London Circus," in Mobile, Alabama; and finally, "S. B. Howes European" in New Orleans. This might be a record for title changes on a single show in one season.

Since our subject is Castello on rails, we must note that the circus went on the railroads beginning on 15 October 1865, and ending on 6 January 1866 in Memphis. It was the first railroad circus to go through a gauge-change station from the northern gauge of 4'-8 1/2" to the southern gauge of 5'.

Because it had been four years since any circus had appeared in the South, the citizens were "circus hungry" in the words of George P. Knott, an advance man and clown. "In the fall of '65 Dan Castello [and S. B. Howes] . . . billed Chattanooga for two days," he noted, "but business was so

Newspaper ad in the Wytheville, Virginia *Sunday Mercury* March 24, 1869. Author's collection.

DAN CASTELLO, THE NAPOLEON OF SHOWMEN! COMING TO WYTHEVILLE, MARCH 24TH, WITH HIS **GREAT SHOW!**

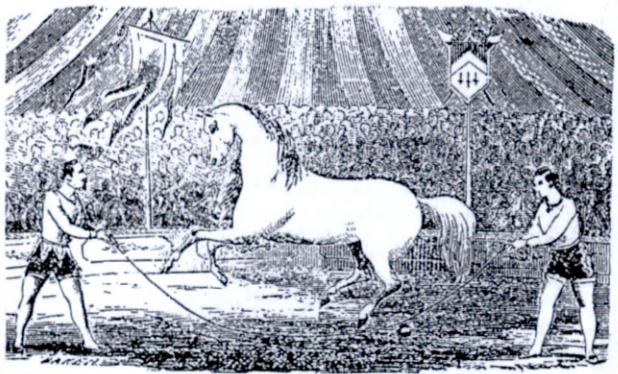
JAMES NIXON.....Superintendent.
DAN CASTELLO.....Manager.
EGBERT C. HOWES.....Treasurer.
CHARLES C. PELL.....General Business Agent.

This Establishment offers for the season of 1869,
MORE NOVELTIES, GREATER ATTRACTIONS, A FINER
EXHIBITION, AND A BETTER CIRCUS,
Than has ever been presented to the people of this Continent.

DAN CASTELLO
WILL APPEAR AS CLOWN,
At each and every performance, and introduce his
HIGH SCHOOL OF EQUINES!
The members of which constitute the
ONLY REAL HORSE SHOW
In the United States, in fact, in the World.

THE EDUCATED MENEGE

Comprises: "CZAR"—The Majestic, FLOATING CLOUD—The Beauty, BLUE
LICK—The Pride of Kentucky. The "Incarnation of Fun,"



DAN. CASTELLO'S GREAT SHOW!



CIRCUS, MENAGERIE AND ABYSSINIAN CARAVAN!

WILL EXHIBIT AT
DENVER, FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND MONDAY,
JUNE Fourth, Fifth and Seventh.
Admission One Dollar and Fifty Cents, Children
under Twelve years of age, One Dollar.

Two Performances each Day, Afternoon and Night.

Exhibition under one Canvas and One Price of
Admission.

Never before in the history of amusement, has any enterprise of a similar
character been inaugurated on so vast and grand a scale as the present Com-
munion, nor has there ever been before offered for public appreciation and pat-
ronage, such a varied exhibition of

AMUSEMENT AND PLEASURE,
Combined with Instruction.
GRATUITOUS STREET PAGEANT.

In this Grand Cavalcade and Moving Picture will appear the
GOLDEN CHARIOT OF THEODORE
KING OF ABYSSINIA.

THE MENAGERIE

Consists of a varied and very fine Zoological Collection, comprising
specimens of

The Rarest and Most Beautiful Wild Beasts,
BIRDS

REPTILES



From every section of the world, the extent and superiority of which is freely
admitted and acknowledged. It contains the most wonderful

TWO PERFORMING ELEPHANTS,
JENNY LIND, PERFORMED BY PROF. NASH; AND THE
BABY ELEPHANT ONLY 38 HANDS IN HEIGHT,

AND A Grand Cavalcade, which is the most wonderful and also the most



Will be introduced into the ring by Mr. Dan, Castello, and give the juveniles an opportunity to ride, in Africa. Prof. Nash will also

Enter the Den of

TRAINED LIONS, TIGERS, LEOPARDS, &C. &C.

Prominent in this Collection is the rare and beautiful

Harte Beast,

The first ever exhibited. Also the GREY SPRING BUCK, another very rare and elegant animal, besides the Bourne Rampal Sacrificer Camel, (Cheetah, or Hunting Leopards, Barbary Zebra, Nil Ghau, Ibez, White Peacock, Hardebeck Hou-luck, Bear, Tapir, Dromedary, Wolf, Tigers, Lynx, Lions, Panther. Over one hundred imported birds and many other animals.



The Circus Establishment

OFFERS FOR THE SEASON OF 1867

More Novelties, Greater Attractions,

A finer Exhibition and a better performance than has ever been presented to the people of this Continent.

DAN CASTELLO WILL APPEAR AS CLOWN

At each performance, and introduce his high school of equities, the members of which constitute the only real horse show in the United States—in fact, the world. The educated menagerie comprises Cheetah, the majestic FLOATING CLOUD, the beauty BLUE LICK, the Pride of Kentucky; the incarnation of Fido, WHIFFA JANUARY and those two comical four footed comedians, ARTEMAS and TIMOTHY.

Mr. Dan, Castello takes especial pride and peculiar satisfaction in being able to present for the first time to an American people, the

BRAZILIAN FAMILY,

OF ALEXANDRIA LOWANDA, a truly gifted household, among whom are MARTINA LOWANDA, the Bare Back Rider of the West; HIGONBITA OLO, LINDA, the beautiful ornaments of the Troop; YOUNG ABRAHAMA LOWANDA, the Boy Wonder, and NATIE LOWANDA. The strength of Dan Castello's Circus has been augmented by the addition of Master DAN CASTELLO, Mr. W. Sparks, Mr. Theodore Hatcher, the Protean Artist; Mr. Henry Baily, the Carr Brothers, Julius Kent, Mr. Miles Morrison, a most efficient Ring Master and a large auxiliary force, making, without doubt, the strongest Artistic Equestrian Combination ever effected.

The Grand Street Pageant

Will leave the Mammoth Pavilion, which covers an acre of ground, and which will comfortably accommodate over five thousand persons, at 11 o'clock, A. M. Performance to commence, afternoon at 2 o'clock, evening, 7 1/2.



Will also Exhibit at

GOLDEN CITY,

TUESDAY, JUNE 18th

CENTRAL CITY,

WEDNESDAY,

THURSDAY AND

FRIDAY, JUNE 19th

AND 20th

GEORGETOWN,

ATURDAY, JUNE

21st; BOULDER.

TUESDAY, JUNE 22



Bottom portion of Denver ad.

good [they] concluded to show a third day, and run through [skipped] Dalton, Georgia, which they did. The people of Dalton were greatly disappointed. Three days behind came Thayer & Noyes, who also billed Chattanooga for two days, but did not run through Dalton as the people tore up the railroad track."

In an interview in the *Atlanta Constitution* of 11 April 1899, Castello told how he outwitted Thayer and Noyes by corraling all the rolling stock in Columbus, Georgia, when the two circuses played there on 10 November 1865. "Sixteen cars in all," he recalled, before the other circus had thought of the matter. "When they got ready to move I decided they'd move on my terms. And they did! They rented six cars from me at \$500 more than I paid for the whole lot, and in addition signed an agreement to play Mobile rather than Montgomery, where I was billed."

Seth Howes and Castello dissolved their partnership on 6 December 1866. James M. Nixon then became Castello's partner. Their circus was again titled "Dan Castello's Great Show." They opened in Memphis on 23 January 1867. We

have found no proof that it was a rail show. We do know, however, that they moved by rail from Milwaukee to Port Huron, Michigan on 15 July, but that may be the only time they took to the rails. It was Castello's third opportunity to own a railroad circus.

The fourth opportunity came with the 1867 show called "Barnum, Van Amburgh & Castello." This conglomeration consisted of a museum collection from Barnum, a menagerie from Van Amburgh (which had been on Gardner & Hemmings in 1866), and Castello's Great Show, which belonged to Castello, Nixon, and Egbert Howes. James Nixon was the manager. They wintered in Mobile, where a fire burned the baggage wagons. They were immediately replaced. Opening day was in Mobile on 13 March 1867. The Van Amburgh menagerie joined on 23 March.

The 1867 parade was outstanding, since it had much of the Howes' 1864 street display that had been brought over from England. This included such famous wagons as one of the Golden Horse bandwagons, the Globe chariot, and the tiered tableau on which a lion and a showgirl rode. A young George "Popcorn" Hall was the lion trainer.

The weather during the winter of 1867-1868 was so pleasant that the Castello circus remained on tour through 22 February 1868. Winter quarters was established in Frederick, Maryland. When the season of 1868 began, Barnum, Van Amburgh, and Castello appeared as Castello, Howes & Nixon. Originally, Nixon was the manager, but he was replaced by Egbert Howes during the tour.

The 1868 show was the first to hire black men to tear down and load each night. In exchange for a free ticket each of the laborers was required to leave their hats with the "bosses." Once the show was loaded the hats were returned. This system only lasted until the laborers figured out that any old hat could be exchanged for a ticket.

The route for 1868 ended in Mobile on 28 December, the show wintering there. The season of 1869, the fifth of Castello's railroad involvement, was also the year in which he and Nixon led the first railroad-mounted circus to traverse the United States from coast to coast.

Opening in Mobile on 26 January, "Dan Castello's Great Show, Circus, Menagerie,, and Abyssinian Caravan" moved by railroad through the Carolinas, and into Nashville, where the company boarded a steam boat. The menagerie was loaded on an accompanying barge. It was a good-sized animal collection for its day. There were two elephants, one large and one small; two Bactrian camels, the "Abyssinian Caravan" of the title, and ten cages. Frank Nash was the lion trainer as well as the presenter of the elephant "Jennie Lind."

The circus moved up the Cumberland River, into the Ohio, and crossed the Mississippi. At Omaha, on the Missouri River, they loaded onto eight thirty-foot system cars belonging to the Union Pacific Railroad. This occurred on 28 May, just eighteen days after the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific joined their rails in Utah to complete the first transcontinental railroad.

On the roster of this famous circus was the Lowande family of riders, and, of course, Castello himself, as leaper and clown. James Nixon was the manager, and Egbert Howes, the treasurer. Howes brought the well-known Van Amburgh bandwagon of 1868.

An interesting aside concerning the show personnel was

provided by Fred Dahlinger, who speculated that William Boone quite likely loaded and unloaded the Castello train. He was later Colonel "Daniel Boone," the first lion trainer to make use of a steel arena, doing so on the Adam Forepaugh Circus in 1891.

The route west from Omaha went through Cheyenne, Denver, Salt Lake City, and into Sacramento on 20 July. On 26 July the circus began a 22 day stand in San Francisco. Redwood City was played on 21 October, apparently the final stand of the season that began in Mobile in January.

John Wilson, the California showman, combined with Leahy, Lake & Co. of Oregon to purchase the Castello show, operating it in California, Oregon and Washington in 1870. The Van Amburgh bandwagon went back east with Egbert Howes, and was on Howes' Great London Circus in 1871. The Lowanda ring horses belong to them. The lion act was Avery Smith's property, and stayed with the new Castello-titled equipment, but was presented by James Crockett.

In the 1899 interview in the *Atlanta Constitution*, noted above, Castello remarked that the 1869 show netted \$1000 a day for 31 days on the western trip. This was divided 50% to Castello, 25% to Egbert Howes, and 25% to James Nixon, all of whom surely thanked their fortune.

This article is titled "Dan Castello," but it could have been called "Dan Castello and Seth B. Howes," for both men contributed to these five railroad shows, and were partners in most of them. Castello's performers and Howes' parade wagons combined to produce the first of the complete circuses traveling on the railroad that were to become the standard of the world.

Castello's Circus toured the wilds of Iowa in 1866. Ad from *Dubuque Daily Herald*.

We are handicapped in that the early railroad shows didn't advertise that they were coming on rails. Apparently, they felt no need to, as the public had no interest in the means by which the shows arrived. These early railers, excepting Castello's, were usually not very grand affairs. Few of them lasted more than one season, many not surviving even that long.

The 1864 "Champion Circus," owned by James Robinson and Frank Howes, mentioned by John Glenroy in his famous memoirs, was one of those that put in a full season. The same year G. R. Spalding's "Dan Rice's Great Show" was another, although its horses were confiscated by the army at

DAN. CASTELLO'S GREAT SHOW!

MORAL EXHIBITION,

And Wonderful Wild Animals.

Remodeled, Refitted and Greatly Improved for
the season of 1866.

JAS. M. NIXON, MANAGER.



At each performance the world renowned humorist and Conversationalist and the best talker of the day

DAN CASTELLO,

Will appear in his motley attire, give his humors of the hour, introduce his magnificent horse with the "Flowing Mane"

THE RUSSIAN "CZAR,"

His sagacious Trick Steed

"ANDY JOHNSON,"



The irresistible pony, the smallest and smartest one in the world, "JANUARY", and those two irrepressible quadrupeds, "them Mules"

Artemas Ward & Brick Pomeroy

one point.

We spoke of Howes and Castello and Thayer and Noyes in 1865. The "Imperial Circus" of 1868 managed by G. W. DeHaven, and owned by William Shephard, was on the Grand Trunk Railroad in Canada as well as on various steamers on the Great Lakes.

The Dan Rice Circus travelled on rails and steamboats in 1869, but without a parade. "No street swindle," its ads proclaimed, although the band was on horseback. That same year, George W. DeHaven traveled by train, steamboat and ox teams to reach as far as the "British border," now called Canada.

The biggest rail show to that time emerged from Cincinnati on 3 April 1871. It was "John Robinson's Menagerie, Aviary and Circus," traveling on 22 system cars. It had all the parts of a complete circus, as named by us earlier in this article, viz, arena, menagerie, 25 cages in this case, parade equipment, concert, side show, and 100 horses. It was the first time in five years that Robinson appeared south of the Ohio River, and the first of many years that they did so. Robinson's reign as the largest railroad circus in the world lasted but one season. In 1872 they were dwarfed by P. T. Barnum's Circus on 65 cars in two trains. It was this huge show that prompted Peter Sells to proclaim: "Taking rail... came upon the circus fraternity like an avalanche."¹

Thus the railroad circus went from eight to ten cars to a behemoth of 65 cars in a matter of eight years.

1. Leander Richardson's *Dramatic New Circus Special*, 1895.

Interviews with Lillian Leitzel, Her Mother and Alfredo Codona

Remarkably, Lillian Leitzel gave an interview to Erna Milde, a reporter from the Ekstrabladet of Copenhagen, Denmark, only hours before she fell during her act at the Valencia Ballroom. The interview was published in the paper's edition of 13 February 1931. The wording of the article's first sentence could be interpreted to mean that she fell on 12 February, not Friday the 13th as every other account of her death states. This anomaly is cleared up by the knowledge that she fell during the late performance in the very early hours of 13 February. The interview was conducted in the evening of Thursday, 12 February. In any event, the circumstances of her fall and death are well known. After some cajoling by Frank McClosky, her rigger, she agreed to be taken to a hospital where she appeared to be recovering. Husband Alfredo Codona arrived on Saturday from Berlin where he was performing. She assured him she was doing better and encouraged him to return to Berlin to fulfill his engagement at the Wintergarten. On Sun-

Lillian Leitzel and Alfredo Codona played the Cirque d'Hiver in Paris before going to Copenhagen to play the Valencia Ballroom.



This gag photo of Leitzel was a Harry Atwell creation.

day, 15 February, she took a turn for the worst and died. She was without a doubt the most charismatic female circus performer

Back of the Cirque d'Hiver flyer.





All photos on this page were taken by Harry Atwell.

to ever appear in America. Ole Simonsen of Allerød, Denmark translated the following articles and provided them to Bandwagon. The original clippings are from Timothy Tegge and the Tegge Circus Archives.

Lillian Leitzel, Master of the Air or the Abolisher of the Law of Gravitation

Lillian Leitzel is a child of our time—every inch an artist but in a modern way and in a scientific sense. When this

female conqueror of the air is doing tricks, which according to the law of gravitation ought to be impossible, every movement is based on exact calculations. Unless everything is done perfect her life is in great danger. Presently Lillian Leitzel performs with her world class act at "Valencia;" before this engagement she spent a month being main attraction at "Wintergarten" in Berlin. But who is this woman who all alone is able to catch the attention of the audiences in a manner making her name world famous everywhere where the art of the ring is respected.

We are meeting Miss [sic] Leitzel at "Grand Hotel Copenhagen" in a suite with a view over the town and we asked the artist to tell about her interesting life.

A Bit of Everything

I am originally a Berlin woman because both of my par-





The Leamy Ladies. Leitzel is at far right.

ents are from Berlin, Lillian Leitzel tells. She is a small, charming lady with beautiful and intelligent eyes. "I was born in Breslau and had my home in England during most of my childhood—to the extent you can say that artists have a home—and the last fifteen years I have been in America, permanently engaged by 'Barnum's' gigantic circus.

A Childhood of Moving

How come it has taken so long before you came back to Europe?

I have been in Copenhagen one time before when I was a small girl performing together with my mother and two small girls she had adopted and trained together with me. I still remember the Tivoli Gardens with the beautiful tulips and I have a vague memory about a truly marvelous ride along the coast [probably a drive from Copenhagen to Elsinore]. I am just waiting for a similar beautiful sunshiny day to repeat the trip—a repeated trip will most likely wake up lost memories, almost forgotten. My mother was a born artist; she was herself from an old artist family and I was trained from the time I was three. In my childhood an engagement [of an artist] was for much longer than present-day engagements. You performed for six months in a row at the same place and often had the same summer engagements for several years. For that reason we settled in London. We had a house on Old Kent Road and my brother, a large, lanky schoolchild, went to college in London. He does not have much talent for artistry and we wanted him to study. Thus, I came second. Today he has a leading position at an American university.

Goodbye to the Piano for the Infant Prodigy

Were you tempted to leave the ring?

I had a very good music teacher and was a talented piano player. When I was ten years old, I was called the infant prodigy [this could also be translated as the wonder child],

but we had a money problem. We did not have much money and when my brother was studying I was needed as my mother's partner. At that time, I already had an important part in the act and thus I had to wave the piano goodbye, although several rich persons offered to pay for my education. I belonged to the ring. We went to America and the Americans were from day one enthusiastic over our act. As time went by, we young girls became grownups. Some day the adopted sisters decided to marry.

On Own Legs

Then there was only you and your mother left?

Yes, but my mother and I decided to split up and perform separately. It was by now impossible to go through with our act, the Leamys [the Leamy Ladies]. To take other artists with the name to the act was out of the question. And to train two new partners would take years. I realized that although I had kept up with my piano playing I would never be anything but a mediocre piano virtuoso. I knew enough of the art of music to know my own lack [of talent] and then I started to make my own artistic act.

I started by combining piano playing with artistic performance, which immediately captivated the Americans. Such a thing would probably have been impossible here in the Old World, but I very soon became well known and I have worked [on my act] ever since.



Codona and Leitzel. Harry Atwell photo.

Guest in the White House

Since then you have performed single [or alone]?

Yes, I have been known for my solo act. In the States, where everyone knows me, I have been the public's favorite. This could be one of the reasons for my long stay in the USA. I had a beautiful home in New York and always a lot of good friends. Mrs. Coolidge is one of my admirers. She is a very charming woman who always comes and sees my act when I am around. When Calvin Coolidge resided in the White House, Mrs. Coolidge invited me to the presidential

home and was very nice to me. America is a wonderful country and I have always some extremely interesting hobby—a hobby-horse—no time to be bored.

Expensive Whims

And these hobby-horses?

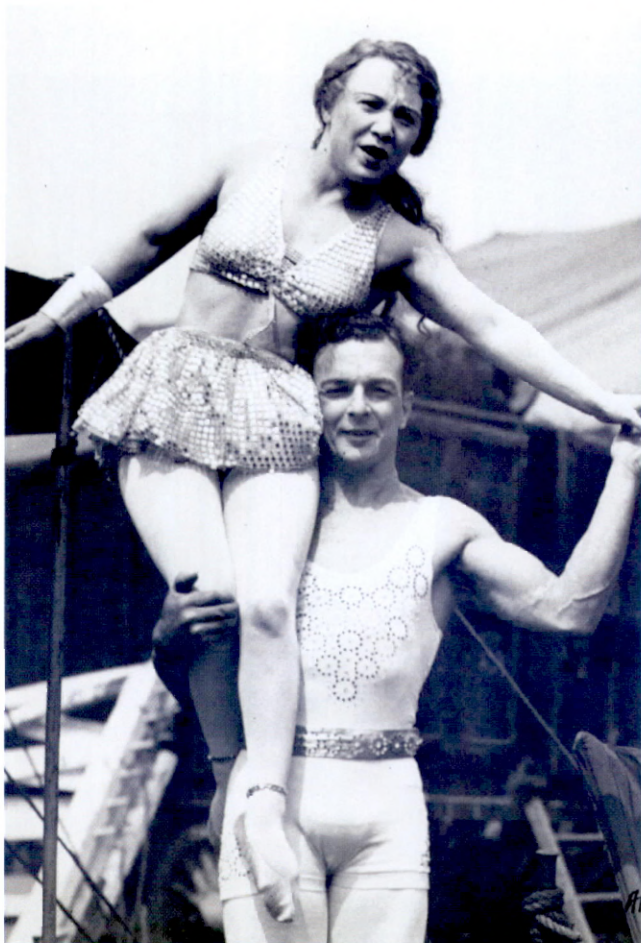
Well, for a while it was diamonds. I was obsessed by the idea of collecting diamonds and searched everywhere for large peculiar stones and simply had to own them. But at last my madness cooled off. Unfortunately, when you can get the objects you want most of all, these objects become uninteresting. Now I couldn't be bothered to look at a diamond. Then came my mania for fur coats and then for cars. The last craze reached its climax when I got a specially built black and platinum colored Packard car, which two years ago I brought with me to Paris where I became sick and got pneumonia. You can hardly think of anything more difficult than to get this car and its driver into France. The Government of France is still holding 5000 of my dollars in deposit for this joke and it is doubtful if I ever get this money back. We artists are born gypsies and can not save our money but use it as the mood strikes us.

The Last and Living Mania

And what is your interest at this moment?

Only my husband Alfredo Codona. To see his wonderful act is for me the most exciting and wonderful thing in the whole world. My man and his brother, the Codonas, were

Leitzel and Codona on Ringling-Barnum in the mid-1920s.



some years ago engaged by Schumann [Circus Schumann in Copenhagen]. Now they have a two month engagement at the Wintergarten in Berlin. I have just learned that he had a fall a couple of days ago. He almost succeeded in doing the dangerous triple somersault—he reached his brother's [Lalo] hands, but in such a way that his brother had to let him go and he was thrown with high speed first at the balcony and then to the auditorium. He hurt his knee but apart from this, neither Alfredo or anyone else was hurt. He has a marvelous way of falling. Only another artist can appreciate the art of turning yourself around after a fall in a way so you fall in a lucky way [to avoid injury].



Leitzel, on right, with her brother and mother.

Fear and Nerves

Are you ever nervous?

Yes, of course. All those of us who perform dangerous acts will once in a while have an accident. But you have to continue your act and to fight the trick that has teased you until you can master it. It is the only way to fight fear. The secret is concentration—when doing your act you will only think of the tricks to be done. I can wake up in the middle of the night scared to death by the thought of not being able to remember how to do a specific trick. But during the act it comes naturally. I will continue my act for another two or three years. Then I will stop; it is a hard job.

The House of Dreams

And what then?

A wonderful house in California is what my man and I presently are contemplating. The Codonas are Mexicans—Spanish-Mexicans. Their act is outstanding. Circus director Schumann is right now in Berlin trying to get an engagement with my husband and maybe with me too, but we are bound [signed a contract] with "Barnum" for this summer. My husband did the breakneck flying act in the movie starring [Emil] Jannings—Variety [original title Variete, a 1925 German film], and the same thing in The Four Devils [a 1928 Fox film, now lost, directed by the great F. W. Marnau]. He



Lillian Leitzel in 1919.

is now writing a number of articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Wealth and Common Sense

California seems to be your preferred place on earth?

Yes. My husband has his family there and both of us have good friends. [The great silent film comedian] Harold Lloyd happens to be one of my best Hollywood friends. He gave a dinner for me in his marvelous home last time I was in California and he is the nicest fellow you can think of, very polite and appreciative of others. In Hollywood, a lot of people are getting megalomania but Harold Lloyd has always kept his balance, although he is one of the wealthiest men in the Movie City.

Leitzel's mother wrote two letters to the Ekstrabladet, which were published in the 7 November and 25 November 1940 editions, after editing by Erna Milde, who did the fateful 1931 interview with Leitzel. The letters were apparently prompted by the showing of the film The Three Codonas in Copenhagen. The 7 November letter follows.

Lillian Leitzel and the Codonas: Her Mother Writes to Ekstrabladet

Shortly we will see the Codona movie based on the tragic story of the Codona troupe. The German movie *Die drei Codonas* will have its first night [in Copenhagen] tomorrow and because of this we have received a letter from Alfredo Codona's mother-in-law Pelikan-Zoe whose daughter, the

beautiful Lillian Leitzel, died after a fall here in Copenhagen.

Mrs. Pelikan-Zoe wants to make Ekstrabladet aware of the movie, which has excited her. She finds the movie excellent, but the terrible and incurable wound caused by her daughter's death was reopened by the movie. Lillian Leitzel's mother has once again looked into old articles including the interview Lillian Leitzel gave to Ekstrabladet a few hours before her fall.

Mrs. Zoe finds it rather strange that her daughter in the said interview mentioned falls. She had accepted the job in Copenhagen while she was waiting for her husband Alfredo Codona and the rest of the troupe. Lillian Leitzel told Ekstrabladet that she was a talented "faller" when she had accidents. Lillian herself as well as Alfredo have had several falls but have so far escaped death. The important thing was that in a circus you had space enough to calculate how to fall. In that connection Lillian Leitzel told the journalist that she did not like to perform outside a circus with its high circus dome [tent] and that it in reality was a mistake that she had accepted to work in Valencia—she didn't know the premises before the arrival in Copenhagen. [Actually the 1931 interview says nothing about Leitzel's aversion to performing outside a circus. But she might have mentioned this matter since the writer of this article was the same woman who did the 1931 interview.]

When Lillian Leitzel's care-laden mother arrived in Copenhagen hoping for her daughter to survive the accident as she had survived previous accidents she talked with Ekstrabladet. Lillian Leitzel's mother followed her daughter everywhere—even when she was touring in America—and since her daughter passed away has lived a quiet and secluded life in Suderengel [?] in Germany. For her, life was over when Lillian Leitzel passed away.

Lillian Leitzel's mother called the movie *Die drei Codonas* great. But those who have seen and can remember "my

daughter's act will know that she could do an act nobody can copy."

In her interview Lillian Leitzel told us that she loved her husband Alfredo Codona more than anything else in this world. The accidents that constantly followed the troupe also caught the great and beloved Lillian Leitzel.

Leitzel and Robert Ringling in the early 1920s.

One of her close friends, Harold Lloyd, had tears in his eyes when, during a visit to Copenhagen, he asked about the circumstances of her death. Her mother has sent us the enclosed photo of mother and daughter (photo from Chicago in 1922).



Leitzel's mother's second letter was published in the Ekstrabladet on 25 November 1940.

Lillian Leitzel's Mother Writes to Ekstrabladet About the Life of Her Daughter

It is well known that the first night in Copenhagen of the

movie *Die drei Codonas* resulted in discussions regarding Lillian Leitzel's participation in the troupe. In the theatre section in *Ekstrabladet* we stated that the famous artist who fell to her death here in "Valencia" never was a part of Codona's aerial [troupe], but always had her own solo act in connection with "The Three Codonas." We have now received confirmation of the statement from Lillian Leitzel's mother. She writes to *Ekstrabladet* about the life of her daughter. Furthermore, she tells [us] that the actress Annelise Reinhold, who plays the part of Lillian Leitzel in the movie, recently visited the small village where Mrs. Eleonore Pelikan-Zoe is now living. She took Lillian's mother to a special showing of the movie in Neustadt arranged to honor the old lady who once herself was a famous artist. It was an important event for the city. But the mother tells [us] that [it] was a rather painful event for her. About her beloved daughter she tells: "My daughter Lillian was born in Breslau and until she was 18 [perhaps 13] years old she was a boarding student at the girls' school.

Lillian and friend in another Atwell photo.

"She had an ear for music and got good training. At that time I was a well-known artist, being the head of the well-known 'Leamy' troupe. I certainly didn't want my daughter to follow in my footsteps. But as Lillian grew up she had her own will. She insisted on becoming an artist and at last I had to realize that she would not change her mind. I permitted her to join me in my tours and she was so talented that at 15 years old she became a member of the Leamys. My daughter and I performed together in 1907 here in Copenhagen at Circus Oluf Rasmussen [I have never heard of a circus of that name].

"After a performance at Madison Square Garden in New York in 1911 Lillian left the 'Leamy Ladies' and started with a fine solo act. I myself had to go back to Germany where my old parents wanted to have me close by. During my stay in Germany I invented an act where I undressed in the air. The act became popular in Berlin and under the name Zoe I performed with this same act in 1917 in Copenhagen at circus Lorenz Hagenbeck [the Carl Hagenbeck Circus appeared in Copenhagen in 1917]. As a result of the war I could not get back to America where my daughter was missing me.

"Lillian had become a great star at Ringling's, the world famous circus. My little girl continued to write to me asking me to see her, but I was not able to go to America until 1922. I went with the first boat that crossed the ocean. The name of the boat was Mongolia.

"It was a wonderful meeting but the climate in America and the exhausting travel unfortunately was bad for my health and I had to return to Berlin. At 55 years old I had my last performance at "Wintergarten" [in Berlin]. The picture show in *Ekstrabladet* a few days ago was from that time. As you can see I still looked young. Inflation was growing and

it was not worthwhile to perform in Germany. But Lillian Leitzel's fame in the States was rising; she made good money, but used it as well. She had her own cars, traveled with her own dresser and [maid?]. In 1927 Lillian Leitzel and Alfredo Codona fell madly in love and married immediately. The three Codonas continued with their act, performing in the same shows as Lillian, who had her own solo act. In 1930 [winter of 1929-1930] they came to Berlin and should have performed at "Wintergarten." But alas—the three Codonas and Lillian Leitzel were supposed to perform two separate acts, but couldn't because Lillian caught a terrible flu. For that reason it was not until 1930 [the winter of 1930-1931] that Lillian had her first night at the Winter-



garten. When my daughter left for her last trip to Copenhagen I should have accompanied her. But Lillian asked me to stay in Berlin and take care of Alfredo. He was her first and only love. Afterwards I deeply regret that I followed her request—if I had joined her things might have been different. The tragic death of Lillian made me stay away from everything which until then had been my life. I retired to Neustadt, the town in Sudentagau [?] where I was born and tried to forget everything in those beautiful rural surroundings. Just before the start of the war [World War II] I, being 76 [74?] years old, had a motor vehicle built for me with which I could travel out into the mountains."

This is what Mrs. Eleonore has written [to *Ekstrabladet*]. It goes without saying that she is a well-known personality in Neustadt where international variety celebrities have a high reputation. The new Codona movie has increased the citizens' respect for this ill-fated woman.

This final item was published in the Danish magazine Tidens Kvinder in 1931.

They Live a Dangerous Life

A while ago Alfredo Codona, the world famous artist who was married to Lillian Leitzel, told a journalist about the dangers connected to the life of an acrobat. We will here repeat some of his remarks, which in a most terrible way was confirmed by the fall of Mrs. Leitzel.

"I am so lucky to be married to Lillian Leitzel who for several years has been a center ring attraction with Ringling-Barnum. She is a tiny woman with huge [or long] hair. Literally she rolls herself up on a web to the top of the tent where she hangs herself in one arm and makes swing-overs in huge swings. Under certain circumstances she has made more than 200 turns during a performance. This requires not only trained muscles and endurance, but also some perseverance. They have not yet invented a bandage which can protect her arms against blood poisoning caused by the wounds 'burned' by the rope. But most of all her act requires as much knowledge of breathing technique as required by any star of the opera. The co-operation between weight and time is so well calculated that an accident could happen if she breathes at the wrong time!"

THE 1937 COLE BROS. PARADE

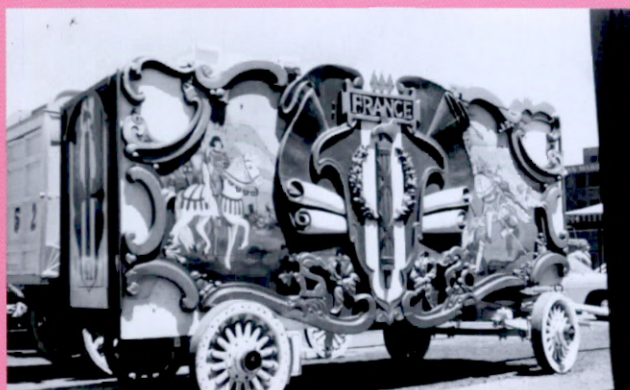
In 1935 two former American Circus Corporation and Ringling organization executives formed a partnership to tour a new railroad circus. Jess Adkins, who had managed the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, and Zack Terrell, who had managed the Sells-Floto Circus, organized the Cole Bros. Circus in the middle of the Great Depression. They hired Clyde Beatty as the feature attraction. The new show bought wagons and equipment from Christy Bros., Robbins Bros. and the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West. The circus traveled on 35 cars, and paraded each day.

The show prospered and continued in 1936. In 1937 the show moved into the big time by enlarging to 40 cars. The show was presented in a 160-foot big top with three 60-foot middles.

In 1937 the parade was enlarged and presented a march nearly as large as the 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace parade. It required about 100 baggage horses to pull the tableau wagons and cages.

This is the listing of units in the 1937 parade: 4 girls on horses; 8 horse hitch pulling the Lion and Mirror bandwagon; 6 girls on horses; 4 horses pulling cage #25 with 3 lions; 4 horses pulling cage #24 with 4 lions; 4 horses pulling #12 cage with 3 lions; 5 girl riders; 6 horses pulling #71 Asia tableau with side show band; Mack truck pulling #28 Hippo cage; 4 horses pulling #17 cage with 3 lions; 6 girl riders; 6 horses pulling #70 Palm Tree tableau; 2 horse tandem, girl rider; 4 horses pulling #13 cage with 2 tigers and 1 lion; 4 horses pulling #14 cage wagon with 3 tigers; 4 horses pulling cage #15 with 3 tigers; 4 horses pulling cage #16, with 3 tigers; 4 horses pulling cage #18 with 3 tigers; 4 horses pulling cage #10 with 1 gnu; 4 horses pulling #79 corner statue with air calliope; 4 girl

riders; 8 horses pulling #72 America tableau with clown band; 4 horses pulling Tally-ho coach with girl rider; 2 horse tandem with girl rider; 1 horse 2 wheel phaeton; 4 Indian riders; 12 cowboy and cowgirls; 6 horses pulling #80 France tableau with #2 band; 4 horses pulling chariot; 4 horses pulling chariot; 4 horses pulling #11 cage with three bears; 6 ponies pulling Mother Goose float; 4 horses pulling #21 cage with 3 deer; 4 horses pulling #19 cage with 2 pumas and 2 leopards; 6 ponies pulling Old Woman in Shoe; 2 donkeys pulling clown buggy; 6 donkeys pulling Unifon wagon; 6 ponies pulling Cinderella float; 4 horses pulling #26 cage with 3 lions; 2 zebras; 4 camels; 23 elephants and 6 horses pulling #66 steam calliope. Total units 43. Fifteen cages were left on lot. The #72 America tableau was not in the parade. Fred D. Pfening, Jr.



The France tableau arrived with the Robbins Bros. equipment in 1935, but was not used until 1937.

The Cole Bros. elephants in parade.

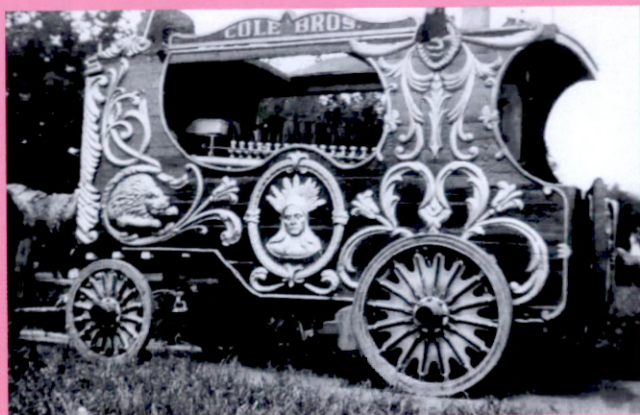




The America tableau.



The air calliope wagon.



The steam calliope.



Cage No. 18.

The Lion & Mirror bandwagon.





The Palm Tree tableau.



The Old Woman in a Shoe pony float.



A typical lion cage from the Christy show.



The Africa tableau.

The Asia Tableau was built for Barnum & Bailey in 1903.



More Traveling with Ringling-Barnum in 1954

By Bill Taggart

After two days in Cincinnati we headed south to Lexington, Kentucky for a July 21 date, an 82 mile jump. We did good business that day and I will always remember the beautiful lot we played. We had a misty rain in the evening, but did good business. I sold some late arrival tickets at the big top entrance as Rudy Bundy and I stood in the light rain or mist.

Mary Jane Miller wrote in the *Billboard* that "summer weather has finally arrived with summer rain." She also reported that Bob Reynolds told a newspaper man in an interview that it usually took three and one-half hours to put the big show up and one and one-half hours for a normal tear down. He also told the reporter that the seating capacity was 8,833 when all the seat wagons were in place.

Thursday July 22 we were in Jeffersonville, Indiana and the next day Evansville, Indiana, which was always referred to as a great show town. We then jumped 144 miles to Paducah, Kentucky.

All of the veteran Cole Show folks loved playing these cities as they had lots of relatives and friends to visit, and they knew the local restaurants, hotels, and watering holes. The usher department also knew the good-times houses to visit in these spots and word traveled fast around the show.

On Sunday July 25 we were in Marion, Illinois, a 64 mile jump on the Illinois Central. On the bus to the lot, I had a good visit with Emmerick Mroczkowski who was visiting his parents during his summer vacation. I asked him if he wanted to be a horse trainer and presenter like his dad, and the reply was no. He wanted to spend his life in Sarasota.

To make a little spending money he sold novelties at a front end joint managed by Louie Gustow. He said that he enjoyed working the come in and blow off, but didn't enjoy working the seats during the show. He liked working tear down with all the butchers on the long side of the big top.

Dick Anderson, far left and the Flying Alexanders.



The yellow ticket wagon where the author worked.

A 64 mile jump on the Illinois Central found us in Centralia, Illinois, and then Jacksonville on July 26 and 27. We played Decatur, Illinois, on the 28th, coming in on the Wabash Railroad. In the morning I stood in the railroad yards for a few minutes talking with flying trapeze catcher Dick Anderson. He became a good friend. Dick was a great catcher and could also push circus programs from his box in the menagerie during the come in.

It was a hot day when we played there, the temperature reaching over 100 degrees. We had a light matinee but a good house at night. Between shows they had a party for Felix Adler at the beautiful Hotel Orlando. They had a painting of Felix hanging in the lobby.

Many of Felix's clown pals and his wife Amelia attended.

On July 29 we played Charleston, Illinois, then made a short 46 mile jump to Terre Haute, Indiana on the New York Central. Alfred Burton and I were looking forward to playing Indianapolis for two days and having time to go to the movies late on Saturday night after the show. We couldn't wait to finish the show in Terre Haute and get it loaded safely on the trains.

On the early morning hours of Saturday July 31 we rolled into the New York Central yards in the great city of Indianapolis, a move of 72 miles. When I climbed onto the bus at the runs, I realized that it was a short drive to the lot; which was the center field of the Indiana State Fair grounds. It reminded me of the great New York State Fair grounds in Syracuse. Fair grounds are wonderful places to play as the lots are usually grassy, with plenty of room for the layout and lots of parking for attendees. They were also on the bus routes and people were use to going there for fun.

That Saturday after the matinee the performers had a backyard party for the great Trygve Teigen, who performed a unique chair balancing act high in the air in display number

two.

I received a letter from my Mom, who lived in Auburn, New York, telling me that a notice was in the local paper about a Robert Weber of Auburn who died working on the circus. His death was due to a heat stroke suffered in Huntington, West Virginia. I never knew him and was unaware of his death. You never really think of a person dying on the show, but in reality it can be a dangerous place. My thoughts turned back to that terrible spell of heat earlier in the season. My guess was that he was part of the big top crew or worked on the train crew as they were the most dangerous jobs.

That night after the show Alfred Burton, Dieter from the Fredonias, the Yong brother Johnny and I went to see a film called Apache. My German pals always wanted to see cowboy and Indian movies.

The show then jumped to Marion, Indiana and on to Fort Wayne before moving back into Ohio. On Wednesday August 4 we were in Defiance. Carl Laun, my pal from Hobart College, and I went to town after we finished erecting the front door marquee. I had saved a few dollars and was anxious to purchase an 8mm movie camera. I wanted to film as much as I could of the show in my spare moments. I bought an 8mm Keystone camera and a few reels of Kodak film.

On Thursday, August 5 we moved into Fostoria, Ohio on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. I was anxious to try some filming with my new camera but for some unknown reason I had to wait until the next day when we were in Sandusky, Ohio. That morning on the train I loaded a roll of black and white film and by the time I reached the lot I was ready. I caught some scenes of the set up, the elephants walking around the lot as they worked, Lloyd Morgan and his assistant Ben Wilson discussing a problem and in the afternoon I caught part of the performance. I filmed Con Colleano on the slack wire, the clown band, Josephine Berosini on the high wire, and scenes of the finale. This was a salute to the United Nations with a huge banner featuring a picture of President Eisenhower floating in the air for all to see. In my film you could see the crowd walking out of the big top and there was also a view of Jackie Besser at his peanut and juice stand in the menagerie.

On August 7 and 8 we played Canton after a 127 mile run on the famous Pennsylvania Railroad, after which we appeared in Dover, Ohio, a short 60 mile move. It was about this time that Noyelles Burkhart received word that his former boss, the owner of Cole Bros. Circus, Zack Terrell, passed away in Owensburg, Kentucky at his beloved farm. Many veteran show folks were saddened by this news. His funeral was held on August 14. Noyelles and wife Hilda left the show and traveled to join her sister Mrs. Zack Terrell and the rest of the Nelson family. My friend Walter Rairden, who was Noyelles's assistant, carried on for Noyelles. For the next few days many great Zack Terrell stories were recalled around the show. Almost every department had at least one former Sells-Floto or Cole show veteran. One was the great clown Otto Griebing.

On Monday August 9 the Pennsylvania hauled the show into Cleveland, a 79 mile run, where we played the lake front lot next to the Cleveland Indians ball park. It



The side show bannerline in 1954.

was warm, sunny weather but with a great breeze off Lake Erie. I took my camera to town and shot views of the wonderful building down town and later many shots of

Emmett Kelly and Otto Griebing cutting it up for me in the back yard. Emmet did the cabbage bit for me and Otto did some high jinks with one of the Nock family girls.

On Tuesday night, the 10th, I took advantage of a late night in Cleveland and joined some of the ticket sellers, Joe Bainbridge, Tommy Reale, and Red Flannagan, and we went to a late night burlesque show. We had a fun time and we realized that it was restful to get away from the circus for a few hours.

Several of my college professors came to visit me and see the show in Cleveland. Doug Mitchell, the drama professor, was really impressed after his visit to clown alley. I introduced him to Felix, Emmett, Charlie Bell and many others in the alley. My friend Dick Brooks, a recent graduate from Hiram High School and a friend from Hiram College, visited with his parents. I introduced him to Rudy Bundy, and Rudy offered him a job for a few weeks on the Front Door. Carl Laun and I took him under our wings and with a hiring slip from Rudy he was able to get fitted for a uniform from Maxie in the band top. That evening he was a ticket taker at the front door.

Early on the morning of Thursday, August 12, we traveled 107 miles over the New York Central to Toledo, Ohio. It was an uneventful run. As soon as I jumped off the train I caught the gilly to the cookhouse for an early breakfast of creamed beef on toast. Dick Brooks enjoyed his first meal at Hotel Ringling.

Once again all of us looked forward to the 58 mile jump

The backyard grease joint.



into Detroit on the New York Central. The lot was the Michigan State Fair grounds on Woodward Ave. and East Eight Mile Road. After I reached the lot I took a cab to town with Rudy Bundy and we visited the store where "Iodine" or Richard Iannone had the advance sale. He was busy and in good spirits for "Iodine." We then went to a hotel to meet a press agent for a late breakfast. Frank Braden was a great raconteur and as usual he told us stories about his early career. John Ringling North would get upset when the local editors wrote lengthy stories about their press agent friend Braden and hardly mentioned him.

Frank Braden.

Every show I worked the ticket box on the long side of the tent. We had good come ins and I was able to make a few extra bucks when there was a hot demand for certain rows of seats in my sections. I was able to sell better seats for a bit of extra money. Braden's press work paid off during the Detroit stand.

Choreographer Dick Barstow flew in from California to rehearse the show and make sure that the production numbers would look good in Chicago. Jean McGuire was up from Sarasota to visit her husband John who was the assistant ticket seller to Bill McGough. Clown Freddy Freeman and his wife Mickey of the wardrobe department were visited by their son who lived in Port Huron.

We had a great weekend in Detroit on August 13-15.

Once we moved into Detroit and did the three day stand there we went on to play nine days more in Michigan. The weather was great, warm days, slightly cool evenings and business was good. We were in Port Huron on the 16th, Flint on the 17th, Saginaw on the 18th, Lansing on the 19th, Jackson on the 20th, Grand Rapids on the 21st, and then Sunday, August 22, on a wonderful grassy lot with a day off in Kalamazoo.

In Flint the director of the local YMCA invited a group of performers to spend some time at the Y swimming pool between shows. Flint is the home of the Buick Motor Car Company and the home of AC Spark plugs.

Saginaw was the home town of Col. Tim McCoy, the



movie star and feature wild west show performer on Ringling Bros. Circus in the 1930's. On August 18, we had a light rain in the morning and the show was a bit late as a seat wagon rolled off the flat car and was slightly damaged. We had a 2/3 house in the afternoon and nearly full house for the night show. The lot was not far from the Saginaw River which led to Saginaw Bay and then into Lake Michigan.

Just before the come in I was sitting in the pass booth near the front door visiting with Hilda Burkhart when suddenly we heard one hell of a commotion. To our amazement we watched as two young elephants quickly ran along side the tent, up the midway, and down the street into a city neighborhood. Hilda's husband Noyelles came over and smiled, and told us that he would

soon be busy handing out passes to those who had their backyards or gardens damaged. In a few minutes Arky Scott, Benny White, and Dan Dewey from the elephant department came back riding the wayward bulls. They were followed by irate and shocked towners. It was then time for Burkhart to go to work and patch the locals. Noyelles was a talented patch or fixer, noted for his ability to cool the locals off with a few kind words and tickets to the performance.

In Lansing we had a half house for the matinee and nearly full house at night and in Jackson on the 20th we had a good afternoon show and an almost full house at night.

I worked in the yellow ticket wagon for both shows and just after the matinee started I was counting my money and unsold tickets when "Side wall Baldy" came over to borrow a dollar from me. I told him I would meet him later in the menagerie. When I finished my accounting and took the cash receipts to Bobby DeLochte in the silver wagon and the unsold tickets to Edna Antes, I went to meet Baldy in the menagerie and loaned him the cash. I asked that if he went to town would he gather up some dated circus posters for me from local stores. He returned before the evening show with about twenty dated sheets for me which I had for many years in my circus collection.

I ate dinner at the cookhouse with Doc Higgins and as we were free for about one hour before first call we took a stroll through the New York Central railroad yards which were close by the lot. We were amazed at the large number of beautiful old steam engines that were waiting to be scraped. It was a sad sight to see for anyone who loves railroads and railroad history.

A 94 mile jump in the early morning hours of August 21 on the New York Central took the show into Grand Rapids, the furniture city. Everyone on the show knew this city as the home of the popular performer Mary Jane Miller. Not only was she a talented aerialist but she also found time to contribute to a column, "Under the Marquee," for the *Billboard*. The weather was fine and I was selling reserve seats on the hippodrome track in front of section N when I

The cookhouse in 1954.



looked down to see the smiling face of my old next door neighbor from Clyde, New York, Doctor Stanley Johnson and his three sons Neal, Craig, and Owen. I was amazed to see them and asked head usher Pete Grace to take them to good seats by the center ring. As soon as I was free I was able to spend time with them in the show and in the backyard between shows. They also enjoyed a circus meal with me at the cookhouse. Doc and the boys were on a trip to Minnesota to see his elderly parents and when they saw circus posters they knew they would have to visit me. I really appreciated their visit.

That night I was in the usher's car on the second section as our train left for a 58 mile run on the Central to Kalamazoo. My friends Carl Laun, Dick Brooks and I each had a cold beer and hamburger cooked by our porter John Martinez. It was a short run but I was sound asleep before we left town.

We all were looking forward to a day off after the show was unloaded from the trains and set up on the lot in Kalamazoo. That Sunday, August 21, was an eventful day, our first day off since July 11 in Zanesville, Ohio. Marjorie Lawson came to Kalamazoo with new baby daughter to visit her husband, Assistant Manager Willis E. Lawson. They had arranged a christening for the child at a local church and General Manager Frank McClosky and wife Fanny were the god parents. Lots of folks from the front end of the show attended the church service.

Daisy Doll.

The downtown restaurants were filled with show folks and a large group went to the historic 1927 State Theater on South Burdick Street to see the new film "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." The musical starred Howard Keel, Jane Powell and unusual choreography by Michael Kidd. The Doll Family with Harry, the world's smallest man, and sisters Daisy, Grace and Tiny were there as were Freida Pushnik, the armless wonder, with her mom and sister Irma. Alfred Burton, all of the Fredonia act, the Yong brothers and sisters, Unus, Alex Konyot and wife Josephine Berosini were all there. I enjoyed the film with Richard Brooks and Carl Lawn.

On Monday I had breakfast in the cookhouse and later walked over to the side show tent to visit with Daisy Doll. We chatted about our Sunday off and stood by as Josephine, the snake charmer, had a bit of an argument with her boyfriend. Josephine was noted for her fiery temperament. I then went to the band top to put on my ticket sellers uniform. All the band guys and ushers were sitting around relaxing before first call. Lew Bader and Andy Grainger of the trombone section were, as usual, talking about baseball

games. I went to Edna's wagon and picked up my matinee tickets and then stopped at the front door to chat with Rudy Bundy. Rudy introduced me to character actor Vince Barnett who was an old friend of his. I was happy to meet him. By the time I got to my ticket box on the track Tex Copland was calling doors, the patrons started rushing in, and Win Danielson started to play "Happy Days Are Here Again" and then "I Got A Gal in Kalamazoo" on the Hammond

organ. I thought how lucky I was to be a ticket seller on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Harry Bert.

After I had checked in at the silver treasurer's wagon, I got my movie camera and went into the backyard to film scenes for my movie of the season. It was a warm sunny day and



I was able to capture some interesting scenes.

After the matinee, I visited with Edna Antes in her ticket distribution office by the side show. Edna had seen the movie on Sunday and also attended the christening of Debra Lawson. She enjoyed her day off and told me that she had had a lovely dinner with Doc Henderson at the large hotel across from the park. We were chatting when in popped one of my favorite advance ticket sellers, Harry Bert. Harry, like everyone on the show, was looking forward to playing his home city of Chicago in a few days.

Tuesday, August 4, found the Ringling flags flying over the big top in Battle Creek, Michigan. This was one of the shortest jumps of the season, only 24 miles on the New York Central. This was our twelfth day in the state, with ninth major cities visited, and with a total of twenty-two performances. The weather for the most part had been fine but everyone was saying "wait until we get to Wisconsin." Battle Creek was the cereal city and the cereal companies annually advertised in the circus program. The Kellogg Company had bits in the clown walk around, to please the younger set. When the top was lowered and the train loaded the show moved out of the town and jumped 81 miles to

South Bend, Indiana. We said goodbye to Michigan for the 1954 season.

On three days the show gave 6 performances in three cities, South Bend on the 25th, Lafayette on the 26th and Chicago Heights on August 27th. From South Bend to Lafayette we moved on the great Wabash Railroad. We were traveling through the Indiana made famous to me by the movie "My Gal Salm" a Hollywood bio-pic of songwriter Paul Dresser, the brother of novelist Theodore Dreiser. Carl Laun, an English major from Hobart College, wondered what was in the air or soil of Indiana since it produced such great writers as Dresser, Dreiser, Hoagy Carmichael, and the great Cole Porter from the circus city of Peru. We had no answer to this question.



Phone Promoters

By Mike Straka

The Wichita Line Man

Jim Flechter was a big man, six foot five inches and resembled Daddy Warbucks, bald head and all. Jim was also a phone promoter. His job was to sell tickets to our magic circus show via the telephone. Each of our performance dates was sponsored by a local charity or civic group. The local sponsor would receive a small percentage of those sales. Most groups made 20% on the phone sales. The sponsors were encouraged to sell tickets through their membership. This almost never happened.

Normally, a phone room would be opened by the promoter about four weeks prior to the show arriving. Some phone rooms remained open throughout the year. After they finished up with one sponsor, they would call the same merchants for another sponsor.

It was during the 1980 touring season and we were scheduled to play Wichita, Kansas. Our local sponsor was the Humane Society. Jim Flechter was given the "honor" of promoting this date. He protested this assignment to Bill English. Mr. English ran the entire phone operations for our 44 week tour, over 250 cities. Bill was no stranger to the circus business. He had worked on major circuses since the 1950's.

After the first few days of work, Jim realized that he was calling merchants and households that had been contacted by four other local sponsors. The local police had just sponsored a circus. When you get a call to help the police send some under privileged kids to the circus, well it's hard to say no.

Now it's not that people didn't care about the work of the humane society, but this was the fifth call within the week.

Jim only had sold about \$500 worth of tickets by week end. Jim was determined to turn this into a winner. He received 30% of all tickets sold by his crew. An additional 10% was held back until show day. We called this an override. After settlement with the sponsors, I would release the 10% to the promoter. Of course, any outstanding debts, or long distance phone bills left by the promoter would come out of their override. Forty percent of \$500 would leave Jim in a very bad situation. Jim had to pay all of his sales people and cover all of his expenses from the forty percent he received.

I spoke with him and told him to do the best he could with the situation. In my mind, I wrote off Wichita and figured it would be a losing date.

When we arrived in Wichita, three weeks later, Jim showed up at the theater. He had a big grin on his face. With his booming voice he handed me the final sales recap sheet and said, "Read it and weep."

My reaction was something like a jaw drop and muttering "What the hell."

Jim had sold \$10,500 worth of tickets. Our normal sales were around \$3,500. It seems that Jim had concocted a brilliant sales pitch. He had gone down to the ASPCA

shelter and tape-recorded hours of dogs barking and yelping. The next day he started his first calls with the tape playing loud in the phone room. During the pitch, he would stop and say, "Oh no, they are putting another one down. You've got to help these animals." The sales rolled in.

It proved hard to say no to the Wichita line man.

A Gifted Promoter

This tale centers on an old time promoter named M. E. Van Dorstan. He was a gifted phone promoter. He traveled the country promoting our show and spent many years running circus phone rooms. Mr. Van Dorstan worked 15 to 20 cities each year. Our tour had more than 200 days each year.

Mr. Van Dorstan was a dead-ringer for Colonel Sanders. On many occasions, he would show up at the show decked out in an all white suit. We never knew what the M or the E stood for. He liked to be called Van.

Van had a young girlfriend named Amanda, an ex-hippie from the 1960's. I believe Amanda was in her 30's. Van was clearly twice that age. Van and Amanda traveled with a large poodle named Poncho Villa. They all traveled in Van's pride and joy--a 1962 pop-top Cadillac. Van once explained that he paid cash for it after a particularly successful promotion. Nothing took priority over the Cadillac. If Amanda wanted a new pair of shoes, she could wait. If the Cadillac needed new tires, then only the best would do.

I quickly figured out that the amount of ticket sales that Van would turn into the sponsor was directly related to the mechanical well-being of this car. When we meet up on show day, I would always start the conversation with an update on the Cadillac. If the repairs were minor, the gross ticket sales would be good. If, God forbid, something major happened, the gross would suffer. When we played Morehead City, North Carolina, Van told me he had to replace the entire engine! After 17 years, he had run-up an impressive 300,000 miles. Amazingly, the gross sales were down by \$2,500 from the previous year. Van mentioned that the new engine had run him about \$2,500. Go figure.

Van turned in impressive gross ticket sales. So keeping the Cadillac running, was a cost of doing business. He managed to get every last dollar out of every town and, the following is one of his secrets. Van was old enough to remember the heel and toe guys. He borrowed some of their techniques.

Just before the show arrived in town, Van would gather up all the tap cards. Tap cards are 4x6 index cards with the name of the business, business owner names and a record of previous purchases. Of course, not everyone would say yes to the phone man's pitch. If the merchant said no, then they would mark the card with a big T.D. (Turned down).

Van would select 30-40 T.D. cards and head out. He would pull up his bright shiny Cadillac and stroll into the business. He would introduce himself and ask to see Mr. Jones, the owner. Van would tell the owner that the Rotary Club (or whatever sponsor we had) was finishing up their fund-raising campaign. Van would pull out the tap card and mention that he noticed that Mr. Jones

had not purchased tickets for the big kiddie's circus. At this point, Van would just shut-up. He told me that a full 50% of the time the merchant would hem and haw but go ahead and make a donation. The other half would say they couldn't help. Van would smile and simply say, "Well, I need to note this." He would take the tap card and start writing on it. He would add, "The club members wanted a list of everyone who said no." This was gutsy but, it paid off. Almost every merchant caved in at this point.

His heel and toe work added more than \$1,000 to each gross. As I said, Van was a gifted promoter.

Prospecting For Gold

Howard Cameron was a gold prospector and a part-time phone promoter. He spent five months each year working the streams around Idaho and Montana, searching for gold. The rest of the time, Howard would run phone rooms for Bill English. I think he was a better gold prospector than a phone man. On many occasions, he would share some of his big finds. I remember one nugget that was quite large. His phone grosses were so-so.

He was assigned to promote Butte, Montana. I can't recall our local sponsor, but it was weak. It was clear from the beginning that Butte would not be a high grossing town on the tour.

We rolled into town on show day and proceeded to the auditorium at the local high school. It was your standard 1920's school auditorium with close to 1000 seats.

Howard showed up as happy as an alcoholic with a full bottle of bourbon. Come to think of it, Howard did like to drink and I believe bourbon was his choice of drink. In a rather loud and dramatic voice Howard exclaimed, "Michael, my boy, I've hit pure gold. Pure GOLD." Of course, I imagined that Howard had found the lost Dutchman's mine or some other treasure. It had nothing to do with nuggets. He handed me the recap sheet and the

sales were more than \$7,000 (which meant that the real sales had to be more than \$10,000).

"This is excellent Howard, how did you get so lucky?", I inquired.

"It had nothing to do with luck. It's my new pitch. It's pure gold. Golden!" He gave me a copy of the pitch that his salesmen would read over the phone. It was an inspired pitch that obviously worked. It worked so well because it was 1979, years before Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Here's the pitch.

Hi is Mr./Mrs. _____, the owner, available?

Good morning/afternoon Mr./Mrs. _____ this is Mike Jones (enter your favorite alias here) calling for your local Lions Club.

PAUSE (Rule #1- Never, never pause in a pitch, the owner will tell you that they just purchased tickets to another local group)

Mr. Smith, I'm not calling to sell you tickets, we finished up on that campaign several weeks ago. In fact, I'll send a runner over to your business with a dozen free tickets. You can give them out to customers, friends whatever.

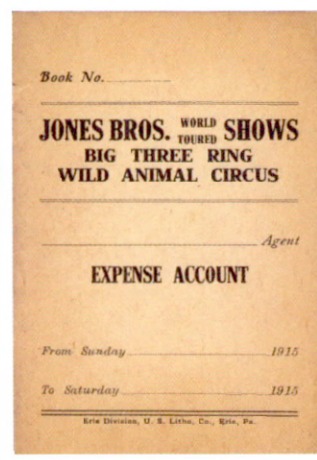
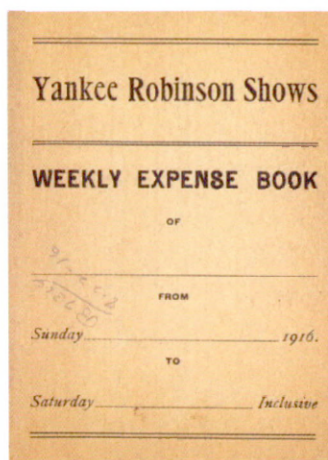
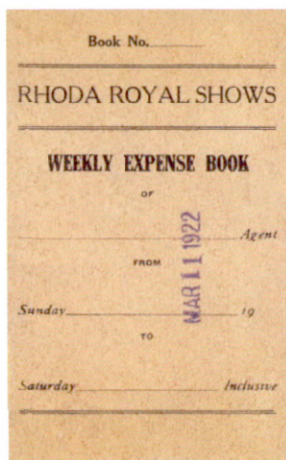
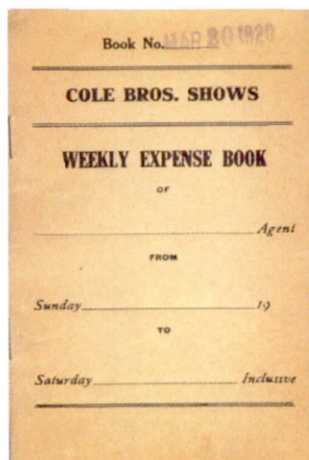
I'm calling because we are taking about 20 kids in wheel-chairs to see the show next week. They are all from the handicapped shelter, and they don't get a chance to see a stage show too often.

Some of the Lions members went down to the high school and noticed that we had a problem. We can't get the kids into the auditorium. There are steps everywhere. Well we are all pitching in and building a ramp for those kids. Will you help us out today with a donation to build this ramp? Can I put you down for a 2x4? A twenty-five-dollar donation will really help us out.

Howard Cameron built many ramps across America that year. They were all "pure gold."

Weekly Expense Books

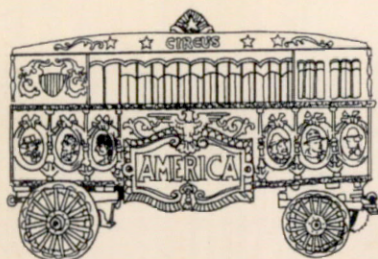
Advance contracting agents and press agents traveling ahead of the circus turned in their daily expenses once a week for reimbursement. These weekly expense books contained a page for each day of the week. They traveled by train using circus script issued by the railroads.



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